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Knight's & Magic



Prologue - Audience with the King

To the east of Zetterlund continent lies a nation situated at the perilous foot of mount Aubigne, Kingdom of Fremmevira. This world had a unique form of natural power- 'magic'. And there were beasts which uses 'magic'-- 'demon beast'. The nation acts as a barrier against the Bocuse sea of trees where many demon beasts lurked. The people called it as the 'nation of knights'.

The year is 1277, winter was over and it was the time for the bountiful spring that brings life. It was during this time when that incident happened.

Battalion level demon beast 'behemoth' attacked. The demon beast crossing the defense line in the eastern borders of Fremmevira kingdom was known as the 'Behemoth incident'.

That demon beast was en route to disrupting the major transport artery of the nation, pushing the kingdom of Fremmevira to the edge of downfall. During this crisis, the ones rising up to the occasion were 'Jantunen garrison knights' and the trainees from 'Laihiala pilot academy'. Without regards for their own safety, they fought the behemoth courageously. At the expense of many sacrifices, they defeated their adversary and brought peace to the nation--

The majestic Aubigne mountain range was right behind the capital of Fremmevira Kingdom, Känkänen.

At the center of the capital was the castle Shreiber, which was surrounded by a lively atmosphere. Bards singing about legendary tales were everywhere, entertaining the people in the taverns who were drinking wine in broad daylight. The merchants used this opportunity to set up shop, advertising their wares loudly. Everyone were enjoying themselves and laughing cheerfully.

This chaotic scene was because of the award ceremony held in the castle for the Jantunen knights and the high school student pilots of Laihiala pilot academy. Those who heard the events of the battle trembled in fear and strongly praised the knights who fended off the demon beast. They also took the opportunity to enjoy this grand event.

An elderly man and a young child walked on the crowded streets of the capital. They were the dean of Laihiala pilot academy 'Lauri Echevarria' and his grandson 'Ernesti Echevarria'.

The streets were overflowing with pedestrians. The petite Eru grabbed on to Lauri's clothes so they won't be separated. In his other hand was a thin slice of baked fruit pie.

"Grandpa, do you want some?"

"Hmm. I'm fine, eat it all, Eru."

Eru nodded as he took large bites as he moved nimbly among the crowd. This was brought from a stall that could be found anywhere along the road.

There are so many people... Grandpa is taking me out for a trip, and it turns out like this.

The young and old pair was in the bustling capital because of the king's invitation. After Eru asked, he found out that Lauri and the king were classmates. Because of this relationship, Lauri held the post of a royal consultant in the past. Lauri eventually became a dean, and their friendship continued till this day. The king knew Lauri was related to 'Ernesti Echevarria', the person who piloted the red Silhouette Knight skillfully during the 'Behemoth incident', so he invited both of them for an audience.

Eru who heard about this couldn't shake off the ominous feeling he had during the journey here. The King had asked specifically for him, he wouldn't let him off easily with just a few questions. With his sigh smelling like sweet fruits, the two of them moved towards the royal castle against the flow of the crowd.

The main gate of the Shreiber castle was bustling with people while the back gate was relatively quiet. Making their way through the crowd, the duo finally reached their destination and were received by guards. They were led to a conference room-like place in the castle and were left alone after being asked to wait momentarily. The grandfather and grandson were alone in the vast room. The cheers of the crowd at the award ceremony could be heard from the distance.

"Eru, are you nervous?"

"Of course. I never thought I would have the chance to meet his majesty."

"I thought Eru won't be bothered by such small matters."

"The way you put it sounds mean, grandpa."

Chatting idly when they were about to meet the king, the two of them were rather audacious.

Shortly after, the guards appeared again and announced the arrival of the person they were waiting for.

They turned and stood. The door opened and several people walked in. Leading the way was the king everyone in Fremmevira knew, 'Ambrosius Tahvo Fremmevira'. He was past his prime, but his ageless majesty could be felt clearly. Two men with the air of nobility followed behind him. When Ambrosius entered the room and met Lauri's eyes, his mouth turned into a smile in an instance.

"Thank you for coming, I have kept you waiting. It's been ages, Lauri."

"Long time no see your majesty. I should be the one thanking you for meeting us despite your busy schedule."

"Don't mention it, this meeting was arranged out of my curiosity after all. Well, he is the pilot of that crimson Silhouette Knight... right?"

Ambrose and the nobles behind him shifted their gaze to Lauri's side. The report stated a child 12 years of age piloted a Silhouette Knight and fought the behemoth, so they thought it would be a youth that looked older than he actually was.

But in actual fact-- before them was a child that was smaller than a normal 12 year old, a boy that could be mistaken for a girl. He had a gentle appearance, a round face with determined bright eyes blinking. His silvery purple hair reached his jaws, covering the side of his face. This made the bunch who had experienced great political trials stiffened. But the king was no ordinary man. After raising an eyebrow in surprise, he changed his expression to one of curiosity in no time.

"Oh, I thought it was a boy from the reports, didn't realize the pilot was a girl."

"No, your majesty. I might look this way, but I am a boy. Pardon my late introduction. Nice to meet you, I am the grandson of Lauri Echevarria, Ernesti. I am very pleased to meet with your majesty today."

"Oh, I heard you are a 12 year old child, but aren't you outspoken? It's hard to converse if you are too formal, please relax."

"Alright, as you command."

Seeing Eru accepting so readily, the two men behind Ambrosius changed their expression from shock to dumbfounded. They were unable to judge if Eru was a great person or just didn't know manners.

"I will get to the point. I invited you here to conclude the aftermath of the 'behemoth incident.' I heard that your performance was excellent, but could not be commended publicly."

Ambrosius said as he looked at Eru.

"I heard you are agreeable with that. But I felt that it isn't right to simply dismiss a capable knight who could fight the behemoth on equal grounds, so I want to give you a fair reward in private. That might be so, but it is hard to give an appropriate reward for an underaged child."

Ambrosius explained with a warm smile-- but no matter how you looked at it, it was a smile with 'malicious intentions'. *To bring up this issue that had already been rejected, is he testing me?* Eru behaved as usual, but the wariness in his heart increased slowly.

"Be it promoting you to a full fledge knight or granting you nobility titles, your age is a limiting factor. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand that this is too much for an underaged child 12 years of age."

"Hmm, how quick witted of you. Eh, and so... what do you want? I think it would be easier to ask the person in question directly. If it is something that matches your accomplishment, I will grant it to you as a reward."

Ambrosius direct explanation surprised Eru. Accepting this proposal, Eru's brain started churning at a high speed.

It's hard to imagine... but is this out of his good will. Or he wants to see if I am easily baited by rewards? Wanting to give me a reward now is suspicious.

A pie that fell out of the sky into his hands. But there were no free lunches in this world. This was common knowledge be it in this world or the previous one.

That might be so, but I can't turn down the offer from the king... I have to say something.

But finding a reward that befits the 'contribution of defeating the behemoth'. How much is this worth in terms of money? How much is it in terms of material? Is there anything he wants aside from titles? Eru simply didn't know how much this is worth. Should he use his age as an excuse and make an unreasonable request-- when he pondered about that, he dismiss the thought.

Wrong, I don't think that is an expression he would show a child.

In Eru's memory, he found Ambrosius' expression familiar. Browsing through his fading memories of his previous life, the warm expression was looking for the smallest loophole in the conversation-- 'the expression of a salesman'. Something must be up.

How about asking for a Silhouette Knight? It would be great to have a reference model. It might work from the contributions I made. Fukeke.

As Eru was about to give in to his desires and made his reply, a strong thought flashed through his mind.

...No, no, this is a great chance. There is no way to tell if I will ever have a chance to ask the king for something. Then I should ask for something only the king could give?... Right, that should be the thing that is the hardest to obtain!!

It was just a short moment, before Eru finished his thoughts. It's fine if it doesn't work, he could think of something else then-- He thought optimistically as he casually said:

"Well, your majesty, the thing I crave for the most right now is knowledge... knowledge on 'how to make an ether reactor'."

The air froze in silence. Hearing this whimsical wish made Ambrosius surprised. That was expected, this was too weird as a wish for a 12 year old child. Not just him, even the usually calm Lauri was tensing up, the other two were stunned and seemed baffled.

They were treating Eru like a child, if the request was 'unexpected', they won't lose their composure. But what Eru wanted was 'impossible' for a person. This answer was too unexpected, even the wise Ambrosius couldn't react immediately, creating a strange silence. The first to react was a noble behind him-- Duke Knut Dixgard.

"You... Do you know what you are saying..."

"Silence."

Knut who almost lost his composure because of the confusion was interrupted by Ambrosius who regained his senses. The relaxed atmosphere from earlier had changed. Facing the king who was displaying his dignity as the head of state, everyone present stood at attention.

"Ernesti, you mentioned the production method of the ether reactor? That is surprising, asking me is the only way of getting your hands on it, but normal people won't want such a thing. And so I have to ask- what do you plan to do with this knowledge?"

The king squinted his eyes, silently applying pressure on Eru. Cold sweat was falling from Eru's back, but he looked back with a steel resolve.

"Right or wrong aside... state your reason. Why do you want such a thing?"

"Yes, I... am currently studying in Laihiala with being a pilot as a goal, but I really wanted to have my own Silhouette knight."

"Oh, a personal Silhouette knight. What a grand aspiration. That is understandable, why not ask for it now? It just might come true."

Listening to Ambrosius' words, Eru shook his head.

"In the past, I just wanted my own Silhouette knight, but it's different now. I... I wish to 'use my own hands to create' the best Silhouette knight that belongs to just me."

Another answer that went beyond his imagination made the king dumbstruck. At this moment, something he read in the report came to mind.

'Changing the magius engine's script by himself' huh? Is this boy serious? He is not kidding, and really hopes to do that?... He had that capability?

Facing the silent Ambrosius, Eru continued to explain:

"This is the reason why I seek knowledge from all fields in Laihiala pilot academy. Getting magical knowledge, learning the construction and piloting methods of Silhouette knights. I had already investigated the technique of constructing the machine frame, but I am still missing a crucial part. That's right, the ether reactor. As your majesty already knows, the method is not available to normal citizens. Hence, when you

mention a reward, I hope you could teach me the production method. If I know how, the next thing would be constructing it.”

Lauri looked at his grandson explain to the king worriedly. He knew Eru was passionate about Silhouette knights, but he didn't think Eru would put caution to the wind and request for it at such a juncture. The situation had already progressed to this stage, it would be hard to help Eru. Lauri glanced at the king and saw that Ambrosius made a serious expression and said heavily:

“... And so, your reason is?”

“Because it's my hobby.”

Everyone present acted as if they saw something strange and their expression was hard to describe. In this silence, a faint suppressed laughter was suddenly heard, making everyone look over in shock. Ambrosius' shoulders were trembling silently, and he suddenly burst out in laughter.

“How... ha! Ridiculous! To say it's a hobby! Hahaha! This is interesting! To seek the classified secret of a nation because of a hobby! Are you really a 12 year old kid? Ke haha! Magnificent. I have not met such an interesting person like you for a long time!”

The two nobles watched the king laugh uncontrollably in shocked silence. Lauri who knew the king the longest could tell he was amused for real and relaxed.

“Fine, I will grant your wish!!”

“Wha... Your majesty, you mustn't! That's not something you can teach an unknown child!”

“I know where he came from, he is the grandson of my friend. That might be so, but it's only natural for you to worry... right? Ernesti.”

After Eru finished his explanation, he watched the situation unfold silently. When he heard Ambrosius saying that, Eru tensed his face.

“I will grant your request. But, this is a classified secret. The mere accomplishment of taking down the behemoth isn't enough.”

Eru's expression turned to doubt. The king accepted the proposal, but commented the accomplishment wasn't enough. This made Eru doubt the king's intention. Ambrosius saw the doubt flash across Eru's face and revealed a joyous smile.

“Don't worry, a king wouldn't lie. I guarantee you that when you had met the adequate amount of accomplishment, I will pass the knowledge on to you.”

This could be interpreted as using a reward as bait, and asking me to work for free... But, it is still an unexpected gain. Forget the terms for now, this is a chance to learn a critical secret.

This reward was worth more than 10,000 in cash to Eru. The cute smiling expression was burning with desire and passion. Ambrosius was certain his plan was right after seeing Eru's face.

“Keke, putting it this way seems a bit empty. I will determine the means. You said you wanted to create Silhouette knights? Well then, show me your worth-- prove that you can use the knowledge of creating ether reactors.”

“Prove... please tell me what should I do?”

“Just create a silhouette knight would be enough. Apart from the reactor, make the casing of the best Silhouette knight in your opinion for me to see. If you satisfy me, I will make this wish of yours come true.”

When Eru heard these words, his expression was like a predator that found prey. The king used the final part Eru needed as the goal. And to Eru, it was something he was going to do sooner or later. And of course, he accepted without hesitation.

“By your command. I will prepare a Silhouette knight that would satisfy your majesty.”

Shortly after the audience with Ernesti ended, Ambrosius went to a private room of the king that wasn't a meeting or audience hall. There was another man in the room-- Lauri.

“Keke, it's been a long time since I had such a fruitful day. Lauri, your grandson is really interesting.”

When he remembered what happened just now, Ambrosius who was a little drunk would smile.

“Sigh, I left his upbringing to my daughter completely. That child had always loved Silhouette knights, but I didn't know he would bring it so far. I didn't grasp the situation and was dripping cold sweat.”

“I heard a 12 year old child fought with the behemoth, so I summoned him to take a look. But you can't say he is a child anymore.”

“Ara, my grandson is still schooling though.”

“Children have to be ambitious, but who would come out with such a weird request? I had heard so many requests all these years, but the request today was ‘superb’!”

The two of them clinked their wine glass and continued chatting in high spirits.

“Because it was too interesting, I accidentally made a happy promise.”

“Because it's my grandson. I will work hard to nurture him and won't let your majesty down.”

“Yes. That's right, I was worried about his future because he was too capable. But after meeting him, I realised that was unnecessary.”

Ambrosius probably thought of that time again as he let out a soft laugh from his throat.

“Ara, for your majesty to have such high expectations, my grandson is quite promising.”

“Kekeke, I am not interested because he is your grandchild, I am curious on what surprising things he would do. Making a better Silhouette Knight-- An absurd task, but he accepted without hesitation.”

As he spoke, Ambrosius suddenly had a precognition that was something similar to a belief.

“It probably wouldn't be long before he brings the results before me.”

“... To make such a promise lightly. I have to advise his majesty to curb his desire for amusement.”

One of the nobles that was present during the audience, Duke Knut Dixgard's complained to his counterpart Marquis Joachim Serrati.

“Watch your words, Duke.”

“His majesty isn’t so petty that he wouldn’t accept advice. Or do you think its fine to disclose a national secret to a suspicious child?”

“I don’t think so... that is why his majesty added these terms. Even if he is the grandson of Laihiala pilot academy’s dean, it is not easy to make a new Silhouette knight.”

“I am not talking about how hard it is, I am saying there is something wrong with this promise itself!”

Knut was indignant, taking heavy steps as he passed through the corridor. Joachim who was following him sees the figures of his children in his mind.

Supplements of the report of Jantunen’s knight commander Philip Hallhagen was done by his daughter -- Stefania. The report included how his bastard children were close to Eru. In the end, Eru was someone he knew.

It might be necessary to gather some intelligence, or issue some instructions to his illegitimate children. Besides Joachim who was deep in thought, Knut’s expression was becoming serious.

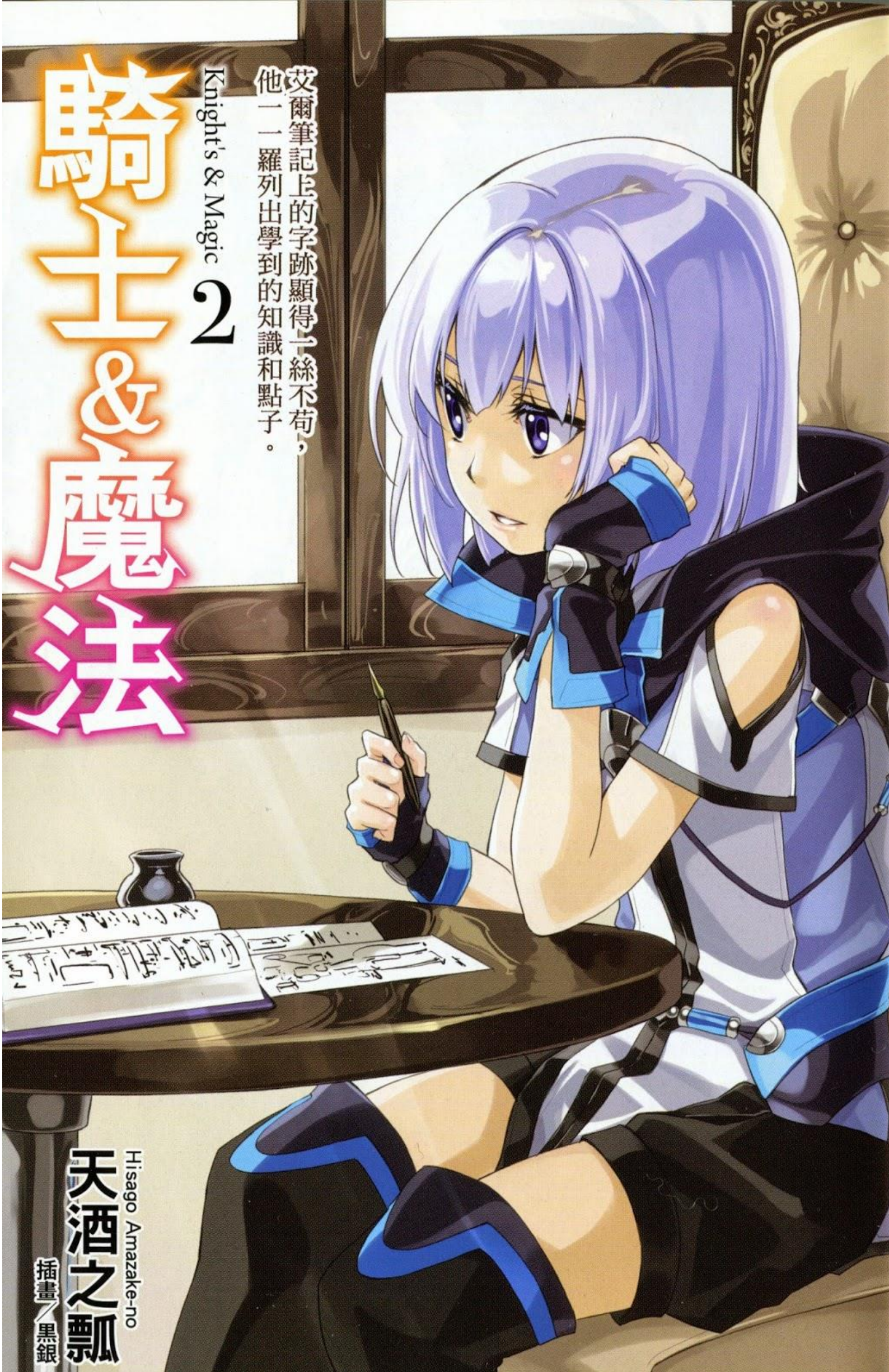
“Even though he is still a child... It’s dangerous to leave him alone.”

These words weren’t heard by anyone, dissipating into the air quietly.

騎士 & 魔法

Knight's & Magic 2

艾爾筆記上的字跡顯得一絲不苟，
他一一羅列出學到的知識和點子。



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Arc 3 New model creation arc

Chapter 10 - Everyone's beginning

Laihiala pilot academy was the largest education facilities in Fremmevira kingdom. It conducts the pilot training programme, and naturally has maintenance facilities to support the usage of the Silhouette knight on campus. Included are the inner skeleton, outer skin, parts crafting and the linking of crystal tissue, a place to assemble all the parts; all these facilities are named as a whole as 'workshop'.

In order to service the 10 meter tall humanoid weapon-- Silhouette knights, the interior of the workshop was spacious. Situated at the edge was the maintenance platform shaped like a gigantic chair. A Silhouette knight was placed on it, and a large group of students were doing maintenance work. The unarmored arm of the silhouette knight was placed on a truck to be transported. The sound of hammers pounding the giant armor into shape could be heard. There was noise everywhere and some of the people were even bickering.

A burly man headed past the frantically working students with heavy steps. No, it was a bit wrong to use burly as the description. The man was short for his age, but he had a stout body. He was twice as thick as a normal man, giving off a strong sense of presence to the surroundings. This wasn't because of body fat, but the strong and thick muscles buffing him up. His finely plaited hair flowing down his back and his magnificent beard clearly showed that he was from the crafting race, a dwarf.

He approached the squabbling students and silently hit them with his arms that were thicker than a human leg. He held back, but being whacked by a dwarf still made the two of them roll on the floor in pain.

"Really, everyone is finding trouble with me at such a busy time!! If you have time to talk trash, then move your hands!!"

"Cough! Bo... Boss! Sorry, we will get back to work right away!!"

If a dwarf gets serious, they could crush boulders with their bare hands. That was no joke. You don't want to get on the bad side of the 'boss' - the leader of the pilot academy's crafting students. The two who were quarreling nonstop rushed back to their work station.

"Stop messing around, half of our knights were destroyed! I had enough."

The Silhouette knights that were heavily damaged in the battle with the behemoth were sent here. It should originally start from repairs, but with most of the machines destroyed with only the core and the frame intact, the school had unanimously agreed to build new ones from scratch.

With the knowledge and skill of the maintenance students, constructing new knights wasn't too difficult. But it wasn't just one or two, with so many orders, the workload dramatically increased. They had to get help from people from the craftsmen department, the academy really went all out.

Even though there were many knights to rebuild, priority was given to machines that had more surviving parts. Those that were heavily damaged and needed a lot of work would be worked on later.

"... This one would be worked on at the very end."

The boss stopped before one of the machines. Although all the wreckages were damaged seriously, only that one's inner skeleton fell completely apart, leaving behind only sparse parts - a terrible sight. The ether reactor and magius engine remaining intact despite the damage was a miracle.

“On closer inspection, the destruction was really thorough. Was it damaged from the mana being exhausted? The inner skeleton is breaking apart.”

The boss was staring at the wreckage seriously for a long while. The students hearing him mumble tilted their heads, unable to comprehend why the boss was so surprised.

“Ah? That should be common right? It can’t be helped if the ether reactor was flattened... Huh?”

The student who was speaking doubted his own words, staring intently at the wreckage. The ether reactor was intact, but the mana was depleted, resulting in the inner skeleton falling apart. Seeing this illogical situation, he finally understood why the boss was puzzled. A new question arose and he asked:

“Ah... Did the silver nerves break? What a special way of breaking down.”

“Oh, that’s right. The way it was destroyed is unique.”

The boss focused on what appeared to be the legs of the wreckage. After removing the armor, the exposed crystal tissue was torn and frayed in the middle. For these experienced craftsmen, this was a familiar symptom: the tissue exceeded its limit and will tear from fatigue sooner or later. That wasn’t surprising, but-

“These fellows had all their parts replaced with new ones before they set off, why would it suddenly tear from fatigue? How was it piloted? Weird, this fellow broke down in a weird way.”

The boss grunted and stiffened his face hidden by his beard. His intuition told him that there was something wrong with the wreckage, the way it broke down was obviously different from all the scenarios they had seen before.

The maintenance department didn’t just do repairs. If there were any structural improvement that could be made, they would be the ones to implement it. Hence, they have to do their best to understand any underlying problems in the machine.

“The name of the machine is Guyale, the knight runner is that fellow Di... What the hell did he do?”

The boss yelled out loud, and tasked someone to bring the pilot of this wreckage to him.

The capital of Fremmevira Känkänen had a famous aristocrat district. Most of the nobles who have their own territory also owned a property here. The Serrati Marquis clan also have a mansion here. The twins Archid (Chid) Olter and Adeltrud (Ady) Olter were led by their sister of a different mother Stefania (Tiffa) Serrati into this place which they hadn’t seen for a long time.

The aged butler led these 3 towards Marquis Joachim Serrati’s study room. The study had a solemn color, reflecting the personality of the owner and a steadfast atmosphere.

Tiffa who could see him every other day aside, the twins saw their father for the first time in years, their nervousness was clear for all to see.

Joachim continued to arrange his documents after they entered, only speaking a few moments later:

“Thank you, Tiffa. It’s been quite a while since I saw the both of you. It’s great that both of you are healthy. Is Irma doing well?”

“Yes, long time no see, father. Mother has never fallen sick before, she is as fit as a fiddle.”

It's a bit awkward for a conversation between parent and child, but it's more than a problem of etiquette. The twins were the illegitimate children of the Marquis, plus their ill relation with the legal wife meant they didn't have much chance to interact with the main family. They seldom talked to their father Joachim, so both parties weren't used to this.

“Father, I have brought them with me, do you have anything for them?”

Tiffa sensed the awkward atmosphere. They had not come out with a way to converse, so getting straight to the point would help them open up with each other.

“That's right... I heard from Tiffa that Archid and Adeltrud have a friend named Ernesti Echevarria, right?”

They never imagined that they would hear this name from Joachim. Not just the twins, even Tiffa had a surprised expression.

“How is he as a person? Do tell me what you know, go on.”

Their father's tone was beyond debate. Chid and Ady suppressed their doubts, looked at each other and described their impression of him: Childhood playmate and their teacher in magic; In terms of magic alone, he should be the top talent within the nation; and his passion towards Silhouette knight, etc.

Even just listening to half of it was enough to shock you, but Joachim did not question and listened quietly. The doubts in the twin's heart grew deeper because they didn't know why their father was interested in Eru. Joachim probably read their doubts from their faces, pondered for a moment and explained:

“He was listed as one of the contributors in the battle with behemoth. Although there weren't any awards for him this time, but it was proposed that he should be rewarded for his efforts in the future.”

“Hmm? This means that Eru's contribution would be properly acknowledged!?”

“Don't be hasty, it's not something that would be decided immediately, it would depend on his performance from now on.”

Eru who risked his life in the ‘behemoth incident’ wasn't recognized or rewarded after the situation was resolved. Eru himself might be fine with it, and he did give up on it without much hassle, but the twins couldn't accept it.

Those who actually watched would definitely know.

That might be the reason why Chid became closer to the father he wasn't good at dealing with. Joachim was strict, but he wasn't unreasonable.

“But father, you said it would depend on his performance, so what should we do?”

“Simple. Just tell me if he accomplishes anything from now on. Understand?”

“Yes father!”

The joy on Chid and Ady's face was easy to see, the tense atmosphere of the visit had also dissipated. The twins were close to Eru and were sure that he would make it ‘big’ one day. If they tell their father at that time, Eru's strength would be recognized. They had always been relying on Eru, so this was some form of paying him back.

Tiffa had a gentle smile too. She also thought that it was wrong to overlook Eru's accomplishment, so her feeling in wanting to help was the same. Joachim didn't change his expression as he watched the cheerful children.

For a whole week after the behemoth incident, Laihiala pilot academy stopped their classes.

As the event overlapped with the field trip, many middle schoolers were injured, there were even deaths among the pilot cadets in high school. The school thus needed time to attend to the situation.

In this sudden holiday, the students who were safe and sound spent their time freely. Some visited their parents back home; Some relaxed in their hostel; others used the chance to play as much as possible. As for Ernesti--

The Echevarria mansion was situated near Laihiala academy city. In one of the rooms in the mansion, Eru was concentrating before a desk, writing down something. The evening sun shone through the windows, only the sound of the pen tip touching the paper could be heard.

"... Hmm-- that should be the rough structure of it."

He just completed a section and returned the pen back into the ink bottle. Eru stretched his back in satisfaction, rotated his stiff shoulders and leaned back onto the chair.

The words on the notebook were tidy, detailing the design theory he had learned in class, his thoughts from observing other pilots and most importantly, the ideas he came up with while piloting, which included his memories from his previous life. This notebook could be described as 'book of terrifying knowledge of a different world'. The last page had the freshly finished sketch of the machine based on these notes.

"With this, I could complete the promise I made with those two... What's left is the promise with his majesty."

He crossed his arms as he mumbled to himself, falling deep in thought once again. He was troubled over the promise he made with the king a few days ago. 'Constructing the best Silhouette knight' -- the content of the promise coincided with Eru's goal, but there hadn't been any progress.

"There are mountains of problems. There are tons of difficulties when making a Silhouette knight... making a Silhouette knight... Silhouette knight..."

The temptation sneaked into his mind when he relaxed, tunneling into a corner of his mind. It spread rapidly like a ink drop in water, taking over his mind. Shortly after, Eru couldn't resist the temptation and said it out loud:

"Wahh, Silhouette knight, I want to pilot a Silhouette knight..."

The worse thing was thinking about related matters. The more Eru tried to not think about it, the more rooted it became in his head. Furthermore, piloting a real Silhouette knight was actually a great stroke of luck. Closing his eyes, Eru could see that scene before him again-- the metallic legs following his command, the strong pace sending strong vibrations; the friction the arm made when it swung the several meters long sword; the inertia he felt whenever he entered the command to move forward; the fight with the powerful giant beast. All these experiences and memories assaulted Eru in the form of an illusion.

"Ughh, I want to pilot some more, just riding for that short while wasn't enough..."

That might be so, but Silhouette knights were not something that you could pilot and run around in. Eru was just a middle school student. Remembering this fact, he laid down on the table meekly.

“No good... I can't work like this. At such a time, I need to go out for a walk.”

He propped himself up, running out onto the streets once he was ready.

Sometime later, Eru showed up at the smithery ‘Termonen workshop’ which was situated in Laihiala academy city. He came to visit one of his childhood friends, the young dwarf Batson Termonen.

As the son of a smithery owner, he should be working to inherit the family business. But after having this strange friend that likes Silhouette knight a little too much, he had slowly drifted onto the path of a Silhouette knight craftsman.

With this background, they had been acting like Silhouette knight fan group.

“... That's what happened. I will be building a better Silhouette knight and present it to his majesty.”

“What ‘present it to his majesty’! Why does it suddenly look like a request from the king!? I don't know what to say to you, there should be a gradual progress in events...”

Eru who strongly believed that the completion day would come chattered cheerfully while Batson just brushed it off casually. Batson thought Eru was going on a field trip, but in the end Eru exchanged blows with the behemoth; Batson thought Eru had safely returned, but he made such a ridiculous promise with the king. Eru's actions had been unpredictable over the years. Batson sighed deeply, giving up on retorting each point.

“...Eh, forget it. This suits your style too. So what are your plans? Do you have an idea about the new Silhouette knight?”

“No.”

“Hey.”

Eru's firm reply made Batson almost fall over. Batson thought Eru had a plan from his confident demeanour.

“If you ask me what I want to create, I do have lots of ideas. But the problem of where to build it hasn't been solved. How about constructing it at your place?”

“Of course not!”

Silhouette knight were about 10 meters tall, a giant robot made from metal, crystal and magic armaments. It requires large facilities, not something you can make in a workshop in town.

“Can't you accommodate this? Aren't we comrades?”

“I don't care if you are a comrade or a friend, no means no!”

As the two of them were chattering happily, the door to Batson's room was suddenly opened with a strong force. Both of them were shocked as they turned to look at Batson's father.

He worked long years as a craftsman and had the feature of a dwarf too. His strong body was full of solid muscles, and his fierce bearded face looked just like a demon. He was emitting a dangerous aura, pushing them back several steps.

“You two... Didn't I say don't be noisy, it would interfere with work?! If you want to be noisy, do it outside!!”

Without waiting for him to finish, the two of them leapt out the window. They didn't hesitate even though Batson's room was on the 2nd floor. Eru who jumped first landed smoothly and used air cushion to catch Batson who jumped next. Their movement was unusually practiced, they had probably done this several times before.

"Eh, we were chased out. What do we do, Batson?"

"Dad is fierce, it can't be helped. Ah, how about going to the pilot faculty's workshop?"

Eru didn't understand why Batson made this suggestion and tilted his head.

"Didn't a bunch of Silhouette knights got totaled in the recent battle? They should be repairing them now, let's ask them to let us observe."

"I get it, that's a great idea, let's go then!"

Eru cheered himself up and ran in the direction of Laihiala pilot academy, with Batson chasing behind.

It was past noon in Laihiala academy city. The two of them reached the campus and were passing through the school gate when they heard someone calling for them.

"Hee, found him."

"Caught Eru--!!"

The ones who grabbed Eru's arms were Chid and Ady. Because they were both taller than Eru, Eru whose arms were caught couldn't touch the ground.

"Eh- Chid, Ady? What is it? This is so sudden."

"Nothing, how should I put it, we guessed that Eru would be here."

"Since we guessed right, we should catch him! Well then, where should we go next?"

The two of them seemed to be grabbing Eru just for the fun of it. Eru swung his legs hanging in mid air and sighed depressedly.

"... I was thinking that the workshop of the pilot school is conducting the repairs of the Silhouette knights, so I wanted to observe."

"Is that so. Let's hurry there immediately!"

"It's fine to go along, you two. But it's about time to put me down."

And so, the 4 of them headed towards the workshop of the pilot school. Although they were just in their first year of middle school, they were already familiar with the layout of the campus and reached there in no time.

They sneakily peeped at the insides of the workshop. The knocking sound of hammers, the rollers of cranes, angry shouts and the roar of the Silhouette knight's engine. It was noisy inside. Eru wanted very much to get closer to watch, but the frightening focus of the craftsmen made them feel bad about intruding. Hence the group slowly moved to a spot where no one was working.

And they came to the side of the machines that suffered devastating damage and would be dealt with later.

At the rear of the workshop was a giant chair for Silhouette knight maintenance. On it were iron pieces that could only be described as wreckage being lifted by a crane. That was probably the torso of the Silhouette knight. As the exterior had caved in, the inner skeleton was also warped. Leaving Eru and Batson aside, the twins couldn't comprehend what that was for a moment. Thankfully, there were scraps of red paint as clues, which led them to think about the original form of that machine.

"That is... eh, could it be Guyale that was piloted by Eru?"

Chid observed the profile of Eru who was gazing at the wreckage and mumbled a question.

"Correct. I remember the armor and the way it was damaged. It is completely wrecked... No wonder they are putting it off until later."

"Amazing, what did you do to destroy it until that stage."

Ignoring Batson who was stunned, Ady stared at the completely totaled wreckage and seemed to be in a trance. The thing before her could tell without a word how desperate the battle with behemoth was. Even the twins who had never piloted a Silhouette knight could imagine it easily.

When they heard Eru talk about the incident in the past, both Chid and Ady thought that they understood how dangerous it was. But the wreckage displayed before them was beyond their imagination and made them speechless. The giant lumps of metal were twisted horribly like clay. How large was the force that destroyed it, and how dangerous it was to face it--

Chid clenched his fist until it was white while Ady was tearing up. One misstep and Eru would have died on that battlefield, which gave them the chills. It couldn't be helped, but the twins were terribly frustrated about not doing anything to help during such a crisis.

"... Pretty."

At this moment, Eru's soft voice spread into the ears of the gloomy twins. They floated up from the sea of regret and turned towards Eru slowly.

"Even a destroyed robot is so pretty..."



Eru sighed, his profile looked so charmed. He didn't realise the atmosphere around him was turning icy and said:

"That's right, when something with a form breaks apart and leaves only wreckage behind, it is known as the 'elegance of silence'. The air of defeat and loneliness... Is so pretty..."

The eyes of the twins met for a split second, the 132nd session of the Olters sibling conference ended with a consensus-- they decided wordlessly to attack Eru.

"!? Ick... Ick hwurts ick hwurts, wife areth youth dowing!!"

Eru's cheeks were pulled hard, making him protest loudly in tears. The twins continued pinching without letting up.

"Eh, you can't blame them, Eru..."

Batson watched calmly from the sides by himself.

"Hey, where did you brats come from! Stop making a racket here!!"

The twins pinched for a moment longer before letting go. Eru who was finally liberated nursed his cheek and was about to protest when a roar came from behind him. It was loud enough to be heard over the other noises in the workshop. They turned to see a dwarf youth with a strong presence -- the Boss, David Hepken .

"Oh? Isn't that the silver boy? You really like it here huh, but don't disturb our work."

The boss knew Eru who was hanging around the pilot school as if it was normal. And he was even here when school was out. Even the boss was stunned. Eru looked beyond him at the person standing behind.

That face was as pale as a ghost, under the eyes were thick eye bags. His carefully combed blond hair was a mess-- the official pilot of the red knight Dietrich Cunitz. For a moment, Eru couldn't link him with the Dietrich in his memories and rubbed his eyes. But no matter how he looked at him, the Dietrich before him was in a distracted and terrible state. His arrogance and cockiness was gone, with frustration and gloom taking its place.

"Eh, umm.... Dietrich... Sempai? Right? What happened?"

Eru asked with a stiff smile that lacked confidence. Dietrich's face looked so down that even Eru was troubled. Dietrich responded with an ugly smile and said hoarsely:

"... Ahh, Ernesti. Ke keke... a little... right, just a little. I had been having nightmares recently... The demons from the infirmary chasing me... which made me lose sleep. If I let my guard down just a little... Ugh, that person acting cute with a terrifying voice, pui!"

As he spoke, it spurred the memories of his nightmares. Dietrich's eyes lost focus and seemed to be drifting off to the other world-- The boss gave him a chop to the head, pulling him back. Dietrich blacked out for a moment and then woke up. The boss' chop probably worked.

"Ugh oh oh... Ah! Where am I... Wah! Eh, forget it. Since Ernesti is summoned here to explain too right? That makes it easier."

"Ahh? What does the boy need to explain?"

"What else, you want to know the reason why Guyale broke down right? Isn't that why you asked the 'reason' to come here?"

The boss looked between Dietrich and Eru's face for a long while, slowly getting what his words meant. His frown got even deeper.

"Wait. Di, from what I am hearing, that boy seems to be the reason why Guyale broke down?"

"Eh? Isn't that... You asked him to come without knowing that?"

"No, I didn't look for him, he just showed up by himself."

The conversation didn't match up and all 3 of them tilted their heads simultaneously. In the space of these few seconds, Dietrich seemed to notice something and clapped his hands together.

"Ah, did I let something slip?"

"I think that's what happened."

The boss stroked his beard out of habit and looked at the 2 of them with sharp eyes.

"Ah, never mind. Just tell me everything."

Seeing the boss smiling deviously as he cracked his bones loudly, no one present had the guts to object.

When Eru was piloting Guyale in the fight against behemoth, Dietrich was watching from behind but he didn't have any clear idea on his actions. Eru's skills were not something that could be understood through observation, so he had to explain by himself. It was still fine in the beginning, but they ran into problems immediately.

"... Pardon, say that again."

"Okay. I took the seat, but my limbs couldn't touch the controls and pedals, so I read through the script in the magius engine and controlled the Silhouette knight by 'processing it myself'."

The boss who always had a scary face opened his eyes wide in surprise, a rare sight. That was understandable, the magius engine exists because it was impossible for a person to keep up with the script processing. Doing the processing by yourself goes beyond common sense. Dietrich who experienced the movement of Guyale first hand aside, no one could have stopped the boss' expression turning doubtful. Dietrich's expression on the other hand turned sharp.

"... Even if I believe everything you say is true, then what? What does it have to do with this fellow breaking apart because of mana depletion?"

"I took the place of the magius engine, which meant I could control all functions of the machine freely. When I was delivering the final blow to the behemoth, I turned off the safety device, using all my remaining mana in that attack. In the end, I accidentally used up the mana that was keeping the structure intact."

"Damn it! How do you want me to resolve the issue that way!! The limiter was meant to keep the mana from depleting completely!"

The boss had a stern tone, but he could only shake his head at Eru's recklessness. He breathed out, his sigh in giving up on lecturing Eru was exceptionally heavy.

"That might be so, but I am the only one who can control it that way, so there is no hurry in solving this right?"

“Of course, it would be a disaster if it could be done easily!! Forget it. And the crystal tissue snapping from fatigue was related to you too right? No, you broke it right?”

“You are right... But being told that in my face still makes me unhappy.”

“Can it, so it really is your fault!!”

“That was the burden of full control. Guyale was under an abnormal amount of strain and broke. This made our situation desperate too.”

“You... After replacing with new parts, it should operate smoothly for more than a month. But you broke it in just one battle...”

The boss couldn't help looking up and covering his forehead with his palm. At this point, he couldn't do anything about it. The work on hand was already a headache, but he noticed the possibility of something worse happening.

“Hey wait. Boy, if you get serious, would all the machines you pilot get destroyed?”

“That possibility is high. The Karrdator operated by the knights have better crystal tissue, so it probably would last longer.”

So it's a problem of bearing the load-- Eru grumbled casually. The boss glanced at him through slitted eyes and his face turned sour.

“Tch! If I don't improve this, I would lose face as a craftsman. That might be so, but I can't solve that problem immediately.”

Speaking of which, pilots that would be so reckless were unheard of, so it's natural for the solution to not exist. Anyway, this was not a problem this facility could tackle. Finding an answer to improve the design was not something you could settle in one day.

The repairs would be left for later, the research to solve this issue would be done later -- the boss secretly came up with a plan. Unfortunately, there was someone who treats unrealistic options as something normal.

“If that is so, I just happen to have a great idea! And there is no downside to it-- the most important thing right now is increasing the toughness of the crystal tissue, right?”

That person was Eru. He raised his hand cheerfully, saying something shocking in a loud voice.

“Huh? Increase the toughness of the crystal tissue? That is easy to say, but how long do you think alchemists spent on researching that? In fact, there has been no breakthrough for the past hundred years.”

“Ah, no. When I say increasing toughness, I am not referring to the crystal tissue itself. I lack the expertise on alchemy anyway, so I want to work on the way crystal tissue is ‘used’.”

In the face of the people who were popping out question marks because of the term ‘used’, Eru used this chance to explain:

“Here is how an old story goes: ‘One arrow is easy to break, but it is hard to do so when 3 of them are tied together’. Which means...”

His proposal was to bind several crystal tissue together in the form of a ‘rope’, By combining the weak individual strands together, the toughness could be increased. By braiding it together, it could improve its elasticity compared to longer strands and enhance power output.

“... I call it ‘strand crystal tissue’. What do you think?”

Eru was brimming with smiles, like a salesman concluding his pitch. Following this, he braided the crystal tissue on the spot and presented the flexible ‘rope’ for everyone to see.

The twins didn’t seem to understand, just accepting everything Eru said. Batson and the craftsmen present reacted very strongly.

The boss picked up the crystal tissue with a slow and deliberate motion and studied it. He started shaking his hand and then fell deep in thought. With his past experience of attempting to improve the Silhouette knight, he wanted to say something, but gave up after failing to find the words. The boss sighed and said:

“To combine the crystal tissue through braiding... this is a blind spot.”

He was usually serious when talking, but the words he said were filled with mixed emotion.

“Is that so? It’s strange that no one ever tried it though.”

“The boy is right. It does seem weird hearing you say that... But improving the Silhouette knight usually starts from the inner skeleton and the placement of the crystal tissue, or enhancing the quality of the materials. No one would think about changing the crystal tissue this way.”

Silhouette knight is a gigantic weapon that mimics a human knight. Based on the idea of ‘Amplifying the power of men’, it had the shape of humans. Although it had the advantage of being easy to pilot and understand, it also limited new ideas to the human shape, holding back development. A pure machine that is piloted like a human, this contradiction was rooted deeply in their psyche. The architects of Silhouette knights lost the idea of making breakthrough from the very basics.

Eru could overcome this because of his knowledge from a different world, where robotics were very developed. Even though his face was covered by his beard, the boss was smiling happily at this moment, a rare sight.

“Haha! After thinking it through, this idea is interesting!! The time is just right, let’s install this thing in that machine we are repairing!!”

The bright and cheery boss made the students take a step back. But the boss was occupied by the Silhouette knight enhancement project and didn’t mind one bit, preparing to give the order to the others--

“By the way, could I make another suggestion? How about changing the exterior shape too?”

-- The whisper of the devil came into the boss’ ears. The boss digested the meaning of these words and turned back slowly. Before him was Eru who had a sparkling smile.

“Boss, I am thinking of adding arms onto the back.”

The boy looked as cute as a girl, saying words gently while smiling like a flower. But the content was incredible. This couldn’t be described as ‘insufficient explanation’, but more like the realm of insanity.

The boss did hear the words clearly, but it took him a much longer time than before to understand. Even the twins who were used to Eru’s erratic nature couldn’t hide their bafflement. The one who was most calm was Batson who had heard plenty of his ridiculous ideas.

For the craftsmen who didn’t even think about improving the Silhouette knight until moments ago, Eru’s words were incomprehensible. Logically speaking, Silhouette knights should be a weapon ‘in the shape of a

man'. And in this world, men usually have 2 arms and legs. Only characters in fairy tales go beyond this norm, so apart from Eru, no one could understand where the idea of adding arms to the back of the Silhouette knight came from.

The stunned boss sighed deeply and wanted to retort, but dropped that idea. It would be nonsense if these words came from some other people, but this was coming from Eru who proposed the new idea of 'strand crystal tissue'. The boss suppressed his voice and struggled to keep his heart normal and asked:

"... Just to be clear, I should ask to clarify. Why? How?"

Even though he was doing his best to suppress it, the boss couldn't keep his voice from trembling.

"As for why... I discovered the last time I piloted the Silhouette knight, that they only have 2 arms."

"Eh? This is obvious, do you need to bring it up? Huh?"

"Sigh, calm down Ady. Let me finish... I think the issue lies with the control of the 'Silhouette arms'. In order to conduct long range attacks, the Silhouette knight has to use 'Silhouette arms'. The armaments have to be operated by hands, so there is a need to change between sword and armaments according to distance and situation."

Eru stopped and looked around. All the faces had the same 'that is obvious, what is the problem' expression on them. He deepened his smile.

"But I think that is inefficient, there would be a gap when changing the weapons too. Obviously, there is no choice but to store the 'Silhouette arms' in close distance combat. So I am thinking of putting something on the back... something like a hand that could operate a 'Silhouette arms'. That way, there would be no need to change weapons and the 'Silhouette arms' would be available anytime."

Everyone wasn't buying Eru's explanation wholesale and had a deeply confused look. They felt something wasn't right and didn't know how to express it-- In that awkward atmosphere, the one who moved was the leader of the engineers-- the boss.

"... I know what you are getting at. Let's leave how to increase the number of arms aside. If we really do add another arm, how would it be controlled? Humans don't have arms on their back, I don't need to explain that right? You can't control things you don't have."

Without needing the boss to point it out, almost everyone was thinking the same thing. Silhouette knight's control was based on the movement of the pilot's limbs. With this system, it was impossible for the pilot to control parts which humans do not have.

Wrong, there was no need to bring out structural logic. Emotionally, they were resisting the addition of parts which humans do not have. It would be the best to laugh this off as nonsense-- such thoughts were formed silently and were the common thoughts of everyone present.

But, Eru's smile did not disappear, and he didn't stop his advance. He is a product of an alternate world, journeying alone outside of the common sense of this world, happily redesigning the existence known as Silhouette knights.

"I understand your concerns, but I am not proposing adding a real arm, so it doesn't have to be as agile as one. In simple terms, it just needs to hold the 'Silhouette arms' and shoot, that's all. Which means..."

Eru took in everyone's confusion and repulsion, describing it casually. The strongest thing that was pushing him was his will and clear objective. Slowly, everyone were convinced by his words.

“At the same time, an automated movement script with aiming function would be added. A device that could control the movement of the ‘Silhouette arms’. This is my proposal... the development of ‘Back weapon’ and ‘Fire control system’.”

There was a small area in the corner of the workshop separated by boards, dubbed the ‘conference room’. Even though Eru’s proposal deviated widely from common sense, the group didn’t reject it and gathered here for a discussion. Eru explained with a clear voice, his chalk making rhythmic sounds on the board, gradually drawing out the whole picture of the alien shaped machine.

“Although I used the word ‘arm’, what I wanted was a simpler design... Something that could hold an object firmly.”

The additional arm -- named ‘auxiliary arm’ henceforth-- would be kept when the ‘Silhouette arms’ were not in use, and would be deployed when in combat, ready to fire. When deployed, the auxiliary arm would mount the weapon over the shoulder, facing forward.

The fire control system is the script responsible for the deployment and retraction of the auxiliary arm. This movement doesn’t require much flexibility, it just needs to be able to deploy and retract the auxiliary arm. Hence, it wouldn’t be a burden on the pilot and could be completed automatically by the system. Just hearing this much, the fire control system script seemed to be used only to point the armament forward, but it’s main feature was the aiming function. Displaying a reticle on the holo monitor, the script links it to the ‘Silhouette arms’ to control the direction of fire.

At this point of Eru’s presentation, the expression of the craftsmen changed. Using the ‘Silhouette arms’ without interfering with the use of hands, it even made the addition of an aiming reticle possible. Although the pilots are the experts in controlling Silhouette knights, the craftsmen doing maintenance also have the related skills. That’s why they could understand the advantage the ‘Back weapon’ brings-- increase in attack opportunity, more variation in tactics, and the possibility of stronger attacks.

“The plan is to install the functionality of the fire control script into the unused area of the Magius engine. Ah, I will be doing this part. Also, the pilot using this function needs to...”

Pilots just need to be trained in using the aiming function. The reason is simple, they do not need delicate control to use the auxiliary arm, the fire control system would automatically deploy, retract and even aim. The control could be done through the pilot seat easily, so there wasn’t any burden when controlling it. If the pilot needed to adjust to the modification, then the training programme of the pilots needs to be adjusted.

“... That’s the summary of the proposal. Further details would be tied down after production begins... How does everyone feel about this?”

Facing Eru who was cutely tilting his head, no one gave a response. Right now, a terrifying silence was controlling the workshop. Eru’s ‘technology’ had turned their perceived common sense on its head: adding parts which deviates from the human form and installing scripts in the untouchable magius engine. Even though they had accepted the idea of strand crystal tissue, Eru’s proposal was very abnormal to the students present.

Eru explained himself clearly, the common language of the engineers were displayed on the board -- ‘technology’. It had no fantasy or fairy tales, with a taste of reality, it couldn’t be ignored with a laugh; and it was full of charm, making it hard to resist.

Seemed like I still got it in me. My presentation skills haven’t gotten rusty. But they still need another push.

In Eru’s eyes, the maintenance students were obviously lost. It’s fine if the presentation wasn’t good enough, they could reject it directly. But the problem was that it was feasible enough to be discussed. Their cultivated common sense was warning them something was wrong, but when Eru brought out the revolution

this technology could bring, their logical side pulled them to accept it. In order to push the group who were caught in this dilemma and fell into silence, Eru continued:

“Even though Silhouette knight mimics the form of men, it is still a tool, a machine. There is no need to be hung up on it being in the form of men... If there is a function that is needed, don't you think its fine to modify how it looks?”

If a devil appeared in any story, it would probably give off this feeling. A beautiful appearance whispering sweet temptation in your ears, luring you away from the straight and narrow line of the world-- As everyone's thought were heading down this divergent path, the boss sighed in an exaggerated manner.

“Really, just who the hell are you? Be it the strand crystal tissue or the back weapon, I don't understand how you keep thinking up things we have never seen or heard of before.”

“How should I put it? I want to do it because it doesn't exist, I wouldn't had done so if it already existed.”

Eru pouted, prompting the boss to stare at him for a long while before laughing out loud. The boss' hearty laughter swept all the doubts and gloom of all who were present away.

“Keke, hahaha! You got me. Yes, you are right! Kick reason to the curb right? I like it. It might be frustrating, but the boy has a point. We craftsmen are professionals who improve Silhouette knights. I will accept your proposal!!”

With this as the cue, the engineers curiosity won against their hesitation. As one, they unanimously moved towards the development of strand crystal tissue, back weapon and fire control system-- a step towards the revolution of a new Silhouette knight model. It might be a small step, but there was a definite change in their mindset.

And so, the ripple that started in Laihiala pilot academy will one day spread through the nation, and push the evolution of the existence known as Silhouette knight in the entire world.

Four figures walked in a row in Laihiala academy city which was basked in the light of the setting sun.

The petite one walking in the middle-- Eru was in a great mood, and seemed to be on the verge of song. That was understandable, he didn't expect to fulfill his ambition of modifying a Silhouette knight. When he thought about the coming days, Eru felt overwhelming joy. Compared to the chirpy Eru, Chid and Ady beside him seemed gloomy.

“Hey Eru, to be honest, I didn't understand everything that happened today. But if the modification goes on, the Silhouette knight would get stronger right?”

“Yes, of course!”

Chid wanted to say something, but seemed hesitant.

“... Eh, Eru... after strengthening the Silhouette knight, are you going to fight the demon beast again?”

Chid's words made Eru blink with a stiff smile. Eru's mind was filled with the 'modification', and totally forgot about how to apply it practically. Facing this unexpected query, Eru cleared his throat to dismiss the anxiety in his heart and forced a smile:

“That, that's right. It's a rare chance to create powerful Silhouette knights after all, and think about it. Becoming a knight or pilot means fighting demon beasts.”

“That's true, Eru has to fight... and you are ready to do so.”

Eru looked surprised by Chid's hesitant expression and was hugged from the side by Ady.

"E~ru! You didn't forget that promise right!!"

"Huh? Umm-- Yeah. About teaching both of you how to fight with Silhouette knights right?"

"Correct. If we put our mind to it, we can do it! I absolutely forbid you from fighting alone again."

Ady remembered the wreckage of the red Silhouette knight. Even though Silhouette knights were known as the strongest weapon of men, there were still lots of demon beast in this world that were stronger than them. When Ady thought that Eru might be in danger, her tears would blur her vision, and the sounds would blur.

"Ady? Are you okay? Don't worry, I had thought about preparation for that too... Oh right! how about asking them to do 'that' too?"

Eru seemed to be thinking of something and snapped his fingers. Ady lifted her face slightly while Batson and Chid looked at each other with a confused expression.

Several days later, Eru and the boss came to Laihiala pilot academy's dean office.

Hearing a polite knock, a calm response came from the dean Lauri Echevarria who was inside. Even though Lauri was a bit surprised, he still ushered them in.

"Oh? Eru and David, what a rare combination."

Lauri offered them a seat as Eru gave him some documents. Inside was the report summarizing the proposal for strand crystal tissue, back weapon and fire control system.

"Dean, the document inside contains the proposal for a Silhouette knight brought up by the silver boy. The maintenance department wants to create a new Silhouette knight using this plan."

Lauri's eyes were wide open after hearing these sudden words and studied the documents seriously. After browsing through it once, he placed the documents on the table and exhaled deeply. Lauri looked into the distance and said:

"Ara... Should I say this is unexpected... you two have stirred up something troublesome."

"It's your grandson who did that."

"That's why it was unexpected... should I say beyond my imagination? I didn't think that you would start so soon. This report seems very unusual. Eru, can it be done?"

Eru smiled like usual when he was asked-- But Lauri who was his family understood that Eru's blue eyes contained unusual passion, confidence and the will to challenge the norm. And as he expected, Eru nodded strongly in agreement.

Your majesty, my grandson is wilder than I imagined. He will probably go beyond my control

"... Grandpa? What do you think? Are you willing to accept?"

"Dean, we should have the freedom in the production and modification of Silhouette knights. But the 'core' of the modification is different from the past, so there would definitely be many problems. That's why we are seeking official authorization."

Lauri whose thoughts were somewhere far away-- specifically, the capital, was pulled back because of these words.

“Yes. A lot of the knights had to be reforged because of damage, so the timing is just right. Some failures are acceptable, just do it the way you want to... Hmm? No, we can’t afford to be slow, we have to finish it fast. If there are not enough knights, the pilots won’t be able to practice.”

Lauri suddenly slapped his knee. The behemoth incident destroyed half the knights of the academy. Even at the full strength of 20, it was not enough for all the pilots in the academy, and they had to take turns. With half of that gone, it would definitely affect training.

“About that, I have another proposal!”

Eru raised his hand strongly and opened the briefcase beside him, taking out a notebook.

“Hey, so that wasn’t all? You are well prepared, boy...”

“I had been thinking about this for quite some time. To conduct Silhouette knight piloting practice, you have to ride a silhouette knight. But the number of the important Silhouette knights are limited, and takes a lot of effort to make new ones... a vicious cycle.”

Lauri and the boss suppressed their doubts and nodded. Eru opened his notebook that was bulging from lots of sticky tabs and showed them the newest page.

“But increasing the number of Silhouette knight presents another set of problem. First would be the expensive parts, reactors and engines. And the specialized workshop to handle large machines and manpower... Taking the cost into account, there is only one answer.”

Lauri and the boss listened to Eru’s explanation, squeezing together to look at the notebook filled with words. On it was a strange object-- A combination of a human skeleton with armor, which was filled with crystal tissue. According to the notes, it was about 2.5m in height, slightly bigger than a normal person wearing armor. But it was about ¼ the scale of a Silhouette knight.

“That’s right, just make it smaller! That will cut down the work, and the facilities to construct it can be smaller in scale too. In other words, it can be mass produced easily. Silhouette knights need ether reactors and magius engine because a single person couldn’t provide the mana and process the script to control such a large body. If the machine is smaller, the burden would be lessened too... It could be operated by just one person. It doesn’t require the heart units, so the price would definitely be cheaper. If you order one now, you can get another one for free!”

Hearing the long sales pitch of Eru, one would suspect him of being a merchant from somewhere. Lauri and the boss had different reactions.

“... Tiny Silhouette knights? You are not satisfied with the new model, and are plotting that too!?”

“I see, but this thing sounds interesting. How about it, David? If it goes smoothly, the pilots won’t be bored out of their mind.”

Hearing Lauri say that, the boss adopted a troubled attitude.

“Dean, I have no objection about making this, but making the new model and this at the same time is too much in terms of manpower. Even if it is easy to make, we simply can’t do both.”

Constructing the new Silhouette knight. That is a tedious mission that is troubling just to think about it. The boss and the engineers don't have the spare energy to work on other projects. Without the craftsmen working on it, it doesn't matter how interesting the idea was.

But Eru was prepared for this.

“Don't worry about this part. The good thing about this is its simplicity compared to Silhouette knights, and it is easy to make. I think it could be done even without the skills of the Sempais in the high school department.”

Understanding what Eru was saying, the expression of these two finally went beyond surprise and turned expressionless. The boss sighed deeply.

“Boy, I didn't know you would go that far.”

The boss was definitely not complimenting him, but Eru simply smiled in reply.

厄爾坎伯 Earlecumber

Main Pilot / Edgar C Blanche

spec

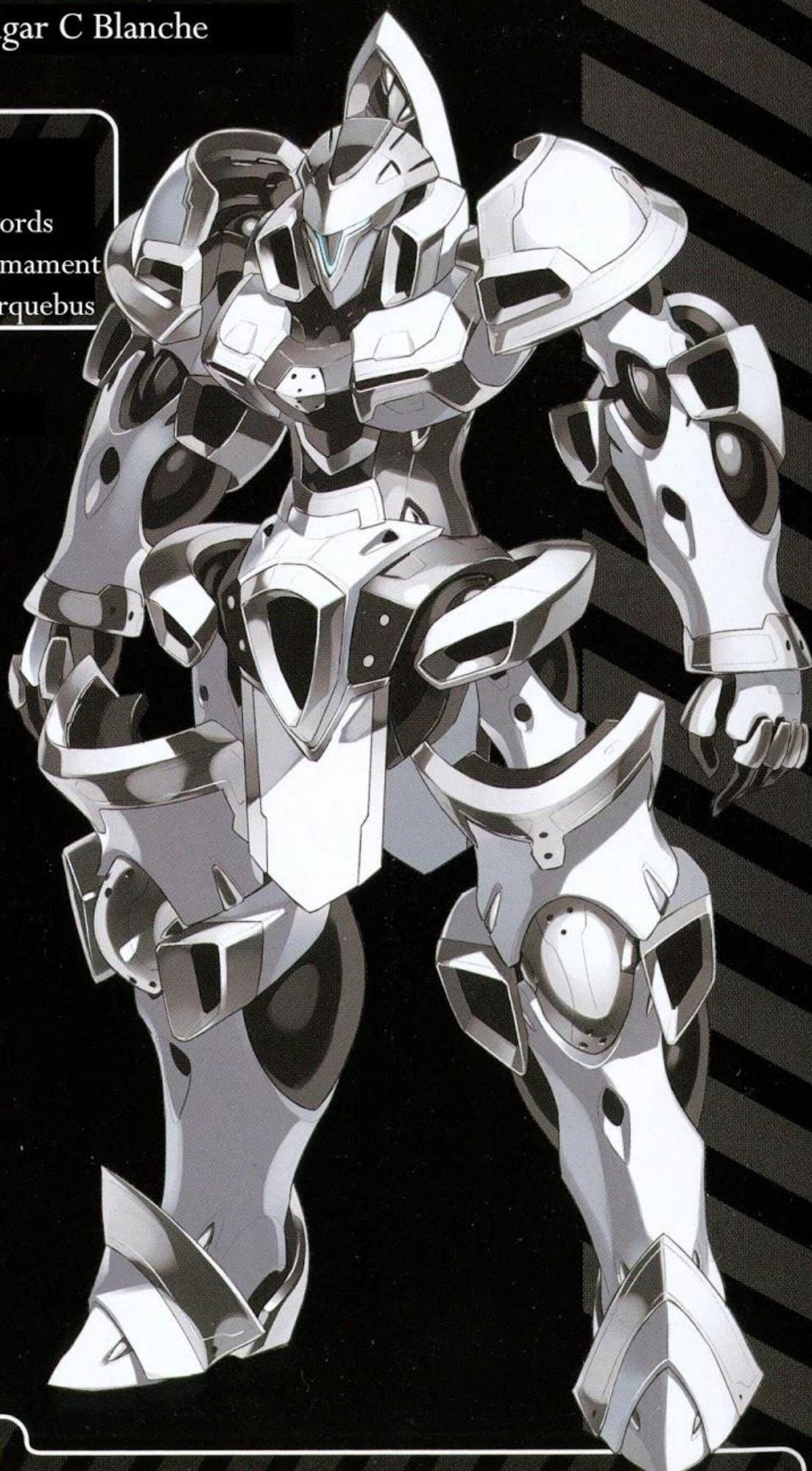
Height / 10.1m

Weight / 18.4t

Equipment / Swords

Shield, Magic Armament

Lightning staff Arquebus



explanation

Training Silhouette Knight of Laihiala Pilot Academy. Similar to Guyale, it was a modified version of an old model. The body was left largely intact and has excellent controls. It's abilities were average, but under the skillful control of Edgar, it held the position of the strongest Silhouette Knight in the academy, and was involved in countless heated battles.

Chapter 11 - Let's design, build and assemble

The plan proposed by the pilot faculty's maintenance department-- breaking out of the mould of repairing Silhouette knights, they had started the building process of the new machine model for half a month now. During this period, the school had resumed classes, and the middle schooler Ernesti had returned to his usual daily life.

The bell announcing the end of lessons rang and the classroom that was quiet when class was in session turned rowdy. The teacher sighed at the sudden change of the students and left after bidding farewell. The day's lesson had finished and school was out. The students who were free from class could spend their time as they pleased. Even though they could be attacked by demon beast if they took a step out of the city, the existence known as students remained the same. It applied to Eru and the others too, although their situation was different.

"Eru, Eru! Let's go practice! Come, we have to work hard today too!"

"Alright, alright, don't need to pull so hard, I will go with you."

Ady couldn't wait as she pulled Eru's hand and Chid followed behind them. They attend classes in middle school during the day, and head for the pilot faculty's workshop after school is out. This was their daily schedule recently.

The workshop was noisy as usual. But the situation today was different than usual. Eru and the others who were chattering when they arrived felt the heavy atmosphere. They saw the boss who was resting on a chair and approached him.

"Hello boss. Why does everyone look so tired today?"

"Ah, silver boy... nothing much, it's just that thing. We made the strand crystal tissue."

"The thing suggested by Eru?"

"Correct, but... I didn't expect the pilot faculty to need a bobbin machine. The clothing faculties people insisted we do it seriously, and showed no mercy."

The boss' eyes were out of focus, a hint of sorrow that couldn't be described as an achievement. The three of them almost burst out laughing when they imagined the muscle bound dwarf using a bobbin machine, that must be hilarious.

"Well, thank you for your hard work, boss."

"Thank you, but it was worth it. Nah, look at this."

The document the boss tossed to Eru listed a lot of numbers, listing the difference when using normal crystal tissue compared to strand crystal tissue in different situations.

Other than this, there was also comparison data for different braiding methods. During the strand crystal tissue creation process, they discovered that using good braiding methods was more effective than simple braiding.

"When I requested the clothing faculty to show me the various ways of braiding crystal tissue, they almost called for a shrink."

The information they gathered from their honorable sacrifice was priceless. The best braiding method improved the maximum power output by 1.5 times, the tightly braided tissues went through repeated stretching tests, displaying a toughness 10 times stronger than before.

“It’s better than we expected. I thought the output would increase by 20 percent, and the lifespan would be extended two times...”

“Ha! You are the proposer, but don’t think we didn’t do anything. Eh, I don’t deny that I am cocky because I attained actual results. I just wanted to test it out, but the results varied wildly depending on how it was used. I think the parts that were used casually have lots of room for improvement.”

As he spoke, the boss laughed like an innocent child. Standing next to Eru, it was hard to tell who was the little kid. As the two of them were discussing the result, there was a sudden uproar coming from within the workshop, and someone was shouting for the boss.

“Boss! The replacement for the arm tissue had been completed!”

“Oh! I will be right there! ... We are going to test the strand model. Boy, come with us too.”

“Of course, please let me see it!”

At the edge of the workshop was a giant figure with some of the armor around the right arm removed, revealing the crystal tissue underneath. The tissues of the arm were thick, which were obviously strand crystal tissue.

If the tissue had the same color as living beings, it would definitely be a scene that was unsafe for mental health. Fortunately, the crystal tissue was murky white. Placed inside the giant body of the Silhouette knight, it gave an impression of being a statue.

“Alright-- Step back! We will be doing test movements! ...Good, please proceed, Helvi!”

“Roger. Proceeding now.”

The students working in the vicinity dispersed. The pilot Helvi Öberg entered the machine seated on the repair dock. The hatch in the chest slowly closed with the sound of compressed air.

They had already investigated the mana output of the crystal tissue, but this was the first time they were testing it in an actual machine. The eyes of the students in the area were sparkling with anticipation, watching with bated breath. The right arm installed with the strand model gripped a giant metal lump. The Silhouette knight obeyed the command to lift its arm, and the crystal tissue could be seen contracting and bulging through the gaps of the armor.

“Oh... That is amazing.”

“Hee-- it has great strength, right?”

The metal lump lifted by the unit required a normal Silhouette knight to use both hands in order to lift it. But it accomplished this easily with one hand. The power output of the strand crystal tissue was incredible. Maybe it was because of the unique nature of the strand model, or the lack of outer skin, but cracking sounds could be heard.

“Power output increment and toughness enhancement seem to be proceeding fine.”

“Right, now we can produce a machine that won’t break down easily even if the boy pilots it.”

As Eru and the boss were passionately discussing the experiment results, a sound was getting louder, and a noise that didn't seem to be from the crystal tissue was mixed in.

"By the way boss, did you hear something? It sounds like... friction."

"What a coincidence, you heard that too? So I didn't imagine that... What did you say?"

The two looked at each other and the instant they turned towards the machine-- they heard a crisp bang, and the right arm literally 'broke'. The crystal tissue fell off and the arm loosened, dropping the metal lump onto the ground. But no one cared about that. The reason was that the armor was sent flying by the snapped crystal tissue, scattering all over. It's no joke if you got hit by the armor fragments of Silhouette knight, and hellish screams erupted in the workshop.

"Wahhhhhh!? Ah, it's coming this way...!!"

Unfortunately, one of it flew towards the boss. Eru stepped before him in the nick of time, drawing his gun staff Winchester to repel the fragments. Eru lowered his stance, shooting out a massive amount of compressed air, deflecting the force of the fragments away. The fragment made a dull explosion sound, drawing a large arc in the air before embedding itself in the wall behind them.

The boss who was in the pilot faculty was a craftsmen, together with the lack of agility of the dwarfs, it's impossible to expect an immediate reaction. He shielded his body and stood stiffly in place like a statue. After a while, the boss looked at the fragment stuck in the wall behind. After seeing the fragment embedded deep in the wall, the boss couldn't utter a sound. Chid and Ady also maintained their position with their bayonet staff out, the place was awkwardly silent.

The boss returned to his senses in no time and immediately inspected the machine that exploded. The right hand was wrecked from the impact and looked terrible. The crystal tissue was scattered all over the place, even the inner skeleton was visible. Eru timidly asked the boss who was enthusiastically inspecting the right arm:

"... Boss, do tell us what you think."

"Ah-- Right there. The crystal tissue itself is fine, but the base securing it to the structure snapped. The tissue increased the output too high, so the other parts couldn't keep up. So that's why. Ara, we really lost to it."

The boss who was laughing dryly shut his mouth shortly after. After meeting Eru's gaze, the two of them sighed deeply.

"Normal means wouldn't work, we would need to modify the entire body this time."

Even though the machine was damaged, miraculously, no one was hurt because it was kept a distance away. The students who crawled out cautiously sighed as they looked at the wrecked right arm.

Strand crystal tissue still had ways to go before practical application. Anyway, they have to reevaluate and use new methods to secure the tissues. It takes time going through the reevaluation from the start, the personnel involved in the designs would be busy for the foreseeable future.

"Well then boss, I will leave this to you... we will go ahead with our training."

"You take care of 'that side' for now. Okay... Hey, stop standing around!! We are starting over with strengthening the clamps!!"

He looked a bit down, but the boss didn't give up and threw himself into the work in hand.

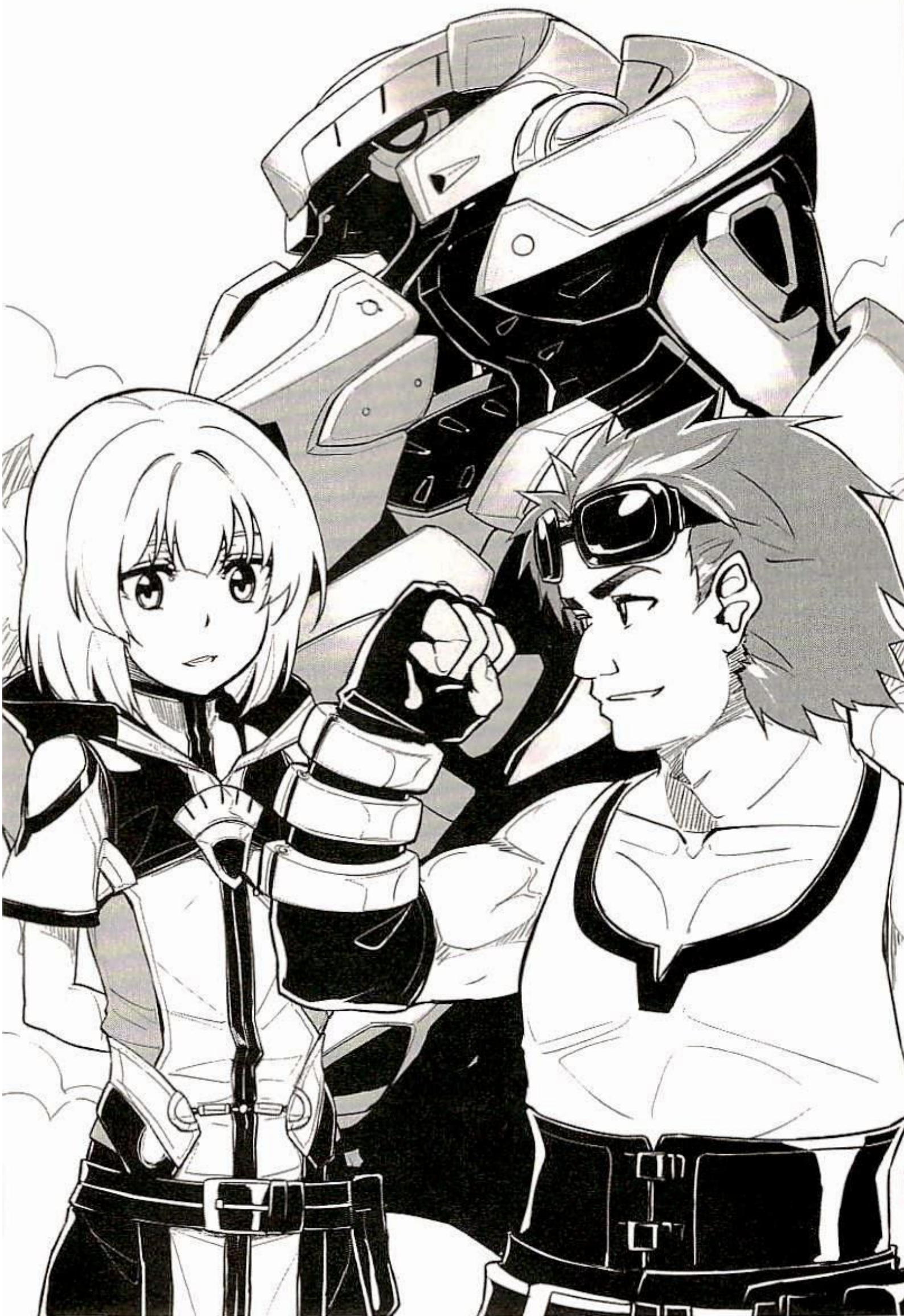
Eru left the workshop that was getting noisy because of the repairs, following Chid and Ady to another corner of the workshop.

There were no Silhouette knights there, instead there were several ‘full body armor’ that had interesting designs. It’s height was big for a human, but it was just 2.5m, small for a Silhouette knight. The head and body were similar to a normal full body armor, the limbs were exceptionally long, the ratio was off.

“Hello-- Batson, how are things going?”

“Oh, Eru. No problem, the ‘Silhouette gear’ is in top condition today too. I can vouch for that.”

Batson answered as he flexed the muscle in his arm. The name for this full body armor was ‘Silhouette gear’, a substitute for a Silhouette knight made through the plans proposed by Eru, it could be viewed as a mini Silhouette knight.



The row of Silhouette gears were being worked on by students other than Batson. From their size, it was obvious that they were not from the high school department, but middle schoolers. The main point of the Silhouette gear design was the ‘miniaturizing and simplification of Silhouette knights’, so the difficulty level was low, even middle schoolers who were aiming to be craftsmen could build it. Batson being involved was a good example, but he had already made a bunch of weird stuff because of his acquaintance with Eru.

“Well then, we will work hard for our training-”

Eru just finished talking when Chid and Ady replied energetically. Speaking of which, the Silhouette gear was something he thought up in order to teach them how to pilot a Silhouette knight, and was used to solve the issue of insufficient machines on campus. Chid and Ady were full of spirit, but so was Eru. For him, even though it was smaller, piloting a robot still made him happy.

Silhouette gear was similar to normal armor, the movements were dictated directly by the user, and needed to be built to the user’s size. For example, Eru was using a machine that had been adjusted for a person with small stature to use; Chid and Ady’s machine were slightly bigger.

Eru stood before the Silhouette gear that was kneeling on the ground with the chest armor open, but he didn’t board it immediately and hugged the torso instead. Seeing Eru smiling with his mouth open, Chid who was behind couldn’t help saying:

“I know you like it, but no matter how much love you shower it with, it won’t respond to you.”

“No such thing. If you shower it with love, it would be obedient to you.”

Chid looked at his Silhouette gear in doubt. Is that really true? How could it be. A weird argument flashed across his mind.

“... No, no way!”

Chid came to his senses when he was just about to be convinced.

“Ughh, Eru only loves Silhouette gear. Sigh, Chid, shut up and board it! Training, we are starting training now!”

“Eh? Oh alright... Is this my fault...”

Chid was rushed by Ady who had already boarded, grumbling slightly as he sat in one of the gears. With the metal closing shut, the sound of air escaping could be heard and the full body armor was enclosed and secured. Chid then grabbed the control inside the Silhouette gear’s arm, moving the machine’s limbs directly as he controlled it with a script at the same time. The Silhouette gear was designed to be controlled in the same way as Silhouette knights for training purposes.

“I am starting it...”

He started using the unique organs common to all beings in this world-- Magius circuit domain to construct a script. The crystal tissue installed inside the gear obeyed the script and the flowing mana, and started to contract and expand. The gear trembled, and stood up a moment later. The mana they put in during activation would be used to move the gear, a machine that directly converted mana into physical movement.

They rode the Silhouette gear and noisily walked outside the workshop. After making their way to the training grounds behind, there were already some other guest there.

“Hello Edgar Sempai. How does it feel using that?”

“Ahh! Ernesti... Hah! Ke!... You could tell just by looking right?”

The pilot cadet belonging to the pilot faculty, Edgar C Blanche was piloting a gear that was made for a tall person. He greeted them as he lifted the legs to walk in large strides. His movements were rough and seemed to take a lot of effort. He was not as good as Eru who could ride the Silhouette gear like second nature, Edgar was still really serious about it.

“I see, that looks interesting!”

Eru nodded as he watched Edgar. Edgar stiffened his already serious face and looked up slightly. Eru knew he had a hard time piloting, but for Eru, ‘the hardship of piloting a robot = a happy thing’. Because Eru thought that from the bottom of his heart, Eru was hard to deal with. Edgar understood that and gave up convincing him. Instead, he crossed his arms and brought something else up.

“Hey Ernesti, I had been thinking about this. This Silhouette gear isn’t bad, but I think... It’s too hard to use!!”

Edgar had a hard time piloting it because of the control method. Controlling with his actual limbs and script at the same time wasn’t a problem, the issue was the type of magic used. Piloting requires high level magic ‘physical boost’, even a top class pilot cadet like him can’t do it well, it’s even worse for normal cadets.

“The necessary controls are too complicated. The script controlling Silhouette knights require less burden than this... It’s not unusable, but definitely not for pilot training. In fact, everyone had already given up.”

Edgar surveyed the training grounds. There were just a few others apart from him. Everybody was complaining after trying it a few times.

“Yes-- you are right. I underestimated the difficulty level.”

“Then make it up with hard work! Nah, look at me Sempai, we can do this.”

Edgar look at Eru, Chid and Ady in turns and sighed softly. Chid and Ady didn’t care about the high school pilots, controlling the Silhouette knight with ease. This was the result of them learning magic from Eru and training together, but others would only lump them together with Eru as abnormal people.

“Don’t ask the impossible, this is not something that could be done in a day or two right? Really... I know how weird you guys are. At this point, I won’t say anything more, just don’t expect normal people to catch up with you guys.”

“Hmm- ugh... it’s a pity, but this can’t be used.”

“That would be true if there are no improvements. This is a mini version of a Silhouette knight right? Then install a magius engine. That should cut down on the piloting burden drastically.”

Edgar told the idea he had to Eru. It made sense, if this goes on, it won’t be usable for the high schoolers, although it’s fine for Eru and the others.

“Hmmm- that’s the only way... This would increase the cost, but it can’t be helped, so that’s the only option.”

But this method presented it’s own set of problems. The small frame of the Silhouette gear couldn’t hold the ether reactor of the Silhouette knight. The main idea was the miniaturization of the machine, but no matter how much of a genius Eru was, he didn’t know the structure of the magius engine. So this problem couldn’t be resolved immediately.

“Ke! What a pitiful sight, Edgar! As the top knight of the pilot faculty, I didn’t expect you to give up so easily!”

Hearing a voice coming from behind him, Edgar turned his head. Before him was Dietrich who was slowly walking towards him in a Silhouette gear, with movements more refined than Edgar.

“... Di, it’s rare to see you so fired up.”

Unexpectedly, Dietrich was serious about learning to control the Silhouette gear. His movement was smoother than Edgar, while Edgar appeared a bit frustrated. Dietrich who was feeling great about that worked harder. As he was preparing to take a large step-- tragedy struck.

“Hmmp, this level is easy... Eh? What? This is bad, I can’t stop--!?”

Although his movement was crisper than Edgar, Dietrich hadn’t mastered it. Because he used too much strength and made a mistake in the controls, the upper torso cracked loudly and bent at an impossible position. Everyone who saw this had an expression of anxiety.

“Di Sempai? Wah, it’s an emergency, send Sempai to the ‘infirmary’...”

When the panicking Eru mentioned the taboo term, Dietrich recovered with amazing spirit. Not just that, he even spun around gracefully and struck a strange pose, saying curtly:

“I, will definitely not go to the infirmary! This, this is nothing!! There is absolutely no need!!”

He posed agilely, but his forehead was full of sweat. Was this the result of physical or mental injury? Everyone was stunned and Dietrich walked towards the workshop while laughing out loud. Edgar who composed himself followed in a hurry.

“... Eh, Sempai seems to be fine. Let’s start our training.”

After blankly seeing their Sempai off, Eru and the others finally started their training. Eru was obviously fine, but the twins could already move around freely. So they upped the difficulty and conducted something similar to battle simulation.

“Silhouette gear have controls similar to Silhouette knights, and it's in the form of full control. Control the movement of the crystal tissue, feel the flow of the mana. Control script. The two of you can move even faster!”

“As if it’s that simple!!”

Training was done with Chid and Ady fighting two on one against Eru. Even so, the twins had never won before. They harbored the will to get one win and launched the attack with perfect cooperation.

Chid lifted a great sword and charged at Eru, using the length of the sword to take the initiative. Eru’s machine opted to close the distance instead. With the large difference in agility, it became Chid’s turn to be on the defensive.

“Oh no! Eru is pressing in. Ady!”

“Leave it to me! I will break off his attack!”

Ady shouted, attacking Eru who was attacking Chid from the side. The machine lifted dual blades just like what its pilot preferred to use, it attacked continuously like a storm-- but it failed to even touch Eru who evaded all the strikes. But even though Ady didn’t gain any advantage, the two on one situation remained

the same. This time, it was Chid's turn to attack Eru's defensive gap when Eru was dodging. The great sword swung down with terrifying speed and was about to hit.

"Nice teamwork... But!"

With an explosive sound, Eru whose posture was very low suddenly accelerated. As he piloted the Silhouette gear, he used his own power to accelerate with air compression magic. Eru jumped with a force threatening to heave up the ground, landing behind Ady who was preparing to change her position. She wanted to escape in a hurry, but was caught by Eru, who tossed her at Chid who was swinging his sword down.

"Hmm! Ugh!"

The machines couldn't stop in time and collided. Looking at the two people he just beat, Eru nodded with satisfaction.

"It's a bit small, but human shaped weapons are great. Power and drive are flowing out endlessly. How long are you two planning to lie there, let's continue!"

"Sigh, don't you think Eru is even stricter than the time he was teaching magic?"

"It's no coincidence. If it has anything to do with Silhouette gear, Eru will become vicious... can't be helped. Alright! let's have another round."

They cheered themselves up and challenged Eru's machine again.

"It's fine if you want to train-- but I'm the one who is doing the repairs, so don't break them..."

The complaints of Batson who was watching this scene dissipated into the wind.

As the day gets colder, the season changed from summer to autumn.

The busy days of everyone went by. Since Eru proposed the plans for strand crystal tissue and back weapons, several months has passed. With the continuous effort of the pilot faculty's maintenance team, they finally completed a 'prototype machine'.

"Ara, we finally reached this stage..."

The boss complained, unable to hide the fatigue in his voice. Some of the students had panda eyes, some were massaging their shoulders, all of them gave off a heavy sense of fatigue. The few months before the completion of the prototype were a living hell.

The one responsible for designs drew all sorts of plans, and the crafting leader completed every one of them. The machine took shape after several trials and errors, no wonder they were so exhausted.

They might be students, but their skill was at the level of professional craftsmen. But this project was a grueling challenge. The harsh everyday condition made them wonder 'why hasn't anyone died'. To reach this stage without losing their drive, it was due to their boundless joy in developing new technologies. The evidence was their eyes that were full of passion despite being worn out.

"Okay, bring it out! Slowly. If you drop it, it won't be settled with just a simple beating!!"

Everyone carried the finished prototype to the trolley, sending it out of the workshop carefully. That thing was a bit strange. Its body was covered by a minimal layer known as 'primary armor' to protect the insides.

Crystal tissue could even be seen from some of the parts. Only the chest and limbs were covered by outer skin, giving off the impression of ‘incompleteness’.

The prototype was quickly sent to the pilot faculty’s training grounds which had the shape of a circular arena. After reaching the center of the training ground, the chest of the prototype which was lying down was opened, allowing the test pilot Helvi to enter the pilot seat.

Everyone from the maintenance team was seated on the audience seat of the arena to observe. In front of them were giant shields that protected them, a lesson they learned from the accident they had earlier. It was natural for them to be cautious. Even though they did several testing for the individual parts, this was the first time the entire assembled body would be tested. To be safe, they removed some of the larger auxiliary parts.

“Okay, Helvi, are you ready!?... For starters, stand up!”

The boss held a loudhailer and yelled. With this as the cue, the prototype started to stand up. The maintenance team members watched its movement closely. The creaking prototype slowly sat up, its movement stiffer than a normal machine, and was very slow. The arms braced the body, the legs bent. From far, the legs that were exerting strength could be seen bulging. After spending quite some time, the prototype machine finally stood up.

“It’s standing...!!”

An emotional voice came from somewhere. When he thought about the effort they put in to make it stand, the difficulties they overcame and the sacrifices, that voice was trembling. Completing this movement that was totally dependent on the power of the leg tissue, it was evident that the structure of the prototype machine could withstand the minimum output of the strand crystal tissue.

“Not yet, be careful now... you over there! Don’t stick your body out! It’s dangerous!! Alright, steady... Helvi, try walking. Slowly, slowly.”

The head of the prototype machine moved up and down, expressing understanding. After stopping for a moment, it decided to walk. Although it was in the center of the training ground paved with stone slabs, its footsteps were extremely careful. It seemed to be walking on a hanging bridge that could break at any time, its speed slower than an ox driven cart. With the sound of heavy steps and churning muscles, it took quite a while to make it halfway around the training grounds.

“The stabilizing components are still in place, it should be able to hold.”

Because it had no outer skin, they couldn’t be careless. But at least it didn’t seem like it would break anytime soon. The prototype machine moved to the front of the students in the maintenance team, and knelt on one knee with an even slower motion. It adopted the position of a Silhouette knight on standby and stopped completely. Only then did the members of the maintenance team sigh in relief. After a moment of silence, there was an eruption of cheers. This was the moment the walking test succeeded-- the moment where their past trial and errors bore fruit.

The chest armor of the prototype machine opened and Helvi appeared. She was probably still nervous as she breathed out hard and wiped her sweat.

“Hey Helvi, how did it feel to pilot that?”

The boss who had looked happy after the successful experiment asked. Helvi replied with a hint of bitterness:

“It was literally a ‘wild horse’. There was too much energy, just walking took a lot of effort.”

“It’s that bad?”

“Yes, the sensation was completely different from the other machines I piloted. To be honest, everyone would need to be retrained.”

“I see... To improve to the stage of walking was a great achievement, but the piloting system still needs to be worked on. That would be left for later... Okay, it might not be too agile now, but since it had no problem walking, all that’s left is to check the other parts.”

Helvi nodded and returned to the pilot seat. After the guys in the maintenance confirmed their safety and picked up their shields, they proceeded to the next phase. Unmodified Silhouette knights carried large target boards into the training grounds and placed them one by one. The boss made his way to the stone paved training ground and kept issuing orders to the students around him.

“Alright, bring in the silhouette arms! For training use! Put the target board at the corner! And someone get the silver boy here! He is probably wandering around in his Silhouette gear anyway, it’s easy to spot him if you search around the vicinity!!”

Around Laihiala pilot academy were some grocery shops and fast food restaurants. The students might not be financially rich, but with their large numbers, the market was rather big. Shops that catered to their daily needs congregated around the campus.

Whenever school was out, stalls sprung out around the roads leading out of the campus. Most of them sold snacks. During this period, the students who were liberated from class were attracted like butterflies to honey, swarming to the stalls to eat the snacks. One of the stalls sold baked fruit pie. The stall owner was baking his pie as usual when he heard a female student place her order.

“Owner, I want 3 fruit pies, with marmalade!”

“Alright-- please wait a moment, it will be done soon...”

The voice of the owner who turned his head to greet his customer became softer gradually. The reason was simple, the one before his stall was a full armored knight instead of a student. It wasn’t as tall as a Silhouette Knight, but it still towered over the tent. It twisted its body and peeked at the stall entrance, looking at the stunned owner with its tilted head. This awkward atmosphere went on for a while as the 2 similar knights came from behind to scold the one that arrived first.

“Hey Ady, why would anyone buy things while piloting that?”

“Hmm? Ah, right! Sorry sir, I must have frightened you.”

The voice of a young girl came from the heavily armored knight. The owner had not shaken off this ridiculous sight when the armor suddenly opened and a real female student came out of it, shocking him.

“Wha, what is this thing!!”

“Ah, owner, the pie is burnt!”

The owner flipped the pie in a hurry upon hearing that, but several of them had already been burned. The girl made an apologetic expression.

“Ah-- sorry, it’s all because of me. We will buy that burned one then.”

“No, even though I was surprised, it was still me who burned it. Please don’t mind that.”

The owner put the fruit jam ordered by the customer into the pie and collected the money at the same time. The female student said her thanks and got back on the armor and left with the other knights.

“... The armor used by the academy recently is incredible...”

The owner held onto the coins with a shocked expression, seeing the 3 knights off.

“Hmm-- It tastes great-- Marmalade is the best--”

“I prefer lychee jam.”

“I’m fine with anything that is sweet--”

Ady, Eru and Chid held their pie in their hands as they moved the Silhouette gear. They looked just like armored knights, but they were walking with a snack in hand-- such a strange scene made the citizens and students give way to them in a panic.

They have been using Silhouette gear not just in training, but in their everyday lives recently as well. As was seen earlier, it was a hassle to wear this in your daily lives, but they were not doing this out of convenience. As everyone knows, controlling Silhouette gear requires the continuous usage of high level magic and drains a lot of mana. Magical abilities could only be strengthened with more training. If one wishes to increase their abilities efficiently, they have to undergo training that was rather difficult.

In other words, it was similar to them jogging while using physical boost magic, training their abilities in their daily lives. By the way, only Eru was piloting it because it was fun.

As they were advancing with noisy steps, a pilot faculty student chased them from behind. He was sent by the boss.

“... Okay, the testing of the prototype machine? Please let us observe!”

After hearing the message conveyed by him, Eru accepted immediately. He even picked the messenger up, not wanting to waste even one second. The Silhouette knight which was controlled by Eru using ‘full control’ had a speed that far exceeded a normal man. Eru who wanted to rush on scene immediately ignored the screams of the student being picked up as he charged toward the campus with bursting speed.

The closer they got to the training ground, the more pilot faculty students there were. Unmodified Silhouette knights were carrying maintenance parts and materials. The craftsmen and pilots were doing all sorts of work together. When Eru and company reached the training ground, they saw a Silhouette knight without outer skin at the center of the stone paved area. It was the ‘prototype machine’ that just finished the walking test.

“It moved just as planned. It’s great it didn’t explode after taking a single step.”

“The part you are worrying about is too basic... Are you really taking it off? If you wear this armor, it would be easier to escape if anything happened alright?”

Eru put down the student who was on the verge of dying and walked to the boss’ side after jumping off the Silhouette gear.

“Oh, you are here boy. Let’s start then.”

“I’m counting on you.”

The strand crystal tissue they conducted the test with, was made by the boss and the craftsmen, completed after many trials and errors. In comparison, the back weapon experiment that would be done next was different-- not just the basic theory, even the design was done by Eru. They got Eru here in order to confirm the next phase.

“It looks fine... how complete is this thing?”

“The turning and aiming was moving as designed before it was installed. What’s next would probably be zeroing the sights and optimizing the set up.”

“That... zeroing thing, what is that?”

“Oh, eh... it's adjusting the aim to be as close to the target as possible... I think.”

“Oh, that’s important. No matter what, all this would have to wait til the experiment is completed.”

Eru replied anxiously after alighting from the Silhouette gear. The twins remained in their Silhouette gears, which obstructed the work going on behind them unwittingly.

“Okay! Let’s start from installing the silhouette arms!!”

After receiving orders from the boss, the student pilots holding the silhouette arms approached the prototype machine. A structure never seen on a Silhouette knight before was attached to the back of the prototype machine. On the place where the shoulder blades of a human should be, a rugged claw that looked similar to the mechanical arms used in manufacturing back on earth sprouted from there. It’s function was similar to that too. This was the main structure of the back weapon-- ‘Auxiliary arm’.

The test movement started from the installation of the silhouette arms, and one was used directly without modification. As the auxiliary arm had a ‘hand’ that could operate silhouette arms, it could be equipped with all sorts of silhouette arms, making it one of the machine’s selling point(?).

The student machine standing behind the prototype machine handed the silhouette arms over to the auxiliary arms. Although the hand of the auxiliary arms was simplified, it’s movement was very smooth as it was made just for holding silhouette arms and nothing else. Each auxiliary arm grabbed a silhouette arms, pointing it upwards.

“Hmm, the movement of the auxiliary arm seems fine.”

Although it required the assistance of another machine to change its silhouette arms, the auxiliary arms were functioning normally. Helvi who was piloting the prototype felt a slight tremor from her back, and confirmed the image on her holo monitor.

“Okay, silhouette arms load out completed, testing deploying function now.”

Before taking the role of a prototype pilot, she had been involved in the development of the back weapon. She had heard the briefing back then and knew the controls very well.

“Deploying silhouette arms, displaying reticle.”

She pulled the lever besides the control stick, which sends instructions to the magius engine which activates the tissue in the auxiliary arms. The auxiliary arms shook slightly and flexed, lifting the silhouette arms up slowly. The auxiliary arms turned from 90 degrees upright to horizontal, resting on the shoulders of the prototype machine, facing forward. Seeing the smoother than expected movement, the maintenance department students were in an uproar. They had seen the structure deploy several times before installation, but seeing it in action while installed was really moving.

Inside the cockpit, there was a change on the holo monitor. It usually only displayed the scene outside, but it had a reticle used for aiming now. A combination of a cross and circle, it was a simple display. But taking the fact that there wasn't anything there in the past, this could be considered a major improvement.

"Aiming... I am going to fire."

Helvi aimed the reticle on the targets. Observing from outside, it was clear that the movement of the head was linked to the direction the silhouette arms were pointing at. She nervously held her breath and cautiously squeeze the trigger. The silhouette arms which received the command shot out magic bullets immediately. It was firing the standard flame bullets from the silhouette arms. The magic bullets emitting red light flew out and hit the target as if they were sucked in that direction. The practice use armaments weren't too powerful, that's why the target kept its original shape, but the burn marks of the bullets were obvious. No one expected the experiment to be perfect, but they still hit the target in the end.

"I thought we would need further adjustment, but we still managed to hit it."

"Isn't that great? Ah, another hit."

The prototype fired more shots. There were some that missed, but the overall accuracy rate was 60%. After finishing, the prototype machine slowly retracted the silhouette arms, which was the deployment movement in reverse. The auxiliary arms folded, keeping the silhouette arms vertically on its back.

The testing objective was the deploy and retract functions, it would be enough if it could fire off shots, so the results were better than expected.

"Oh... So this is back weapon... This thing might be more powerful than I imagined."

After witnessing the results, even the boss was stroking his beard in praise. The students who were watching the prototype machine in action congratulated each other passionately. It was because the strand crystal tissue, back weapon and fire control system-- the light at the end of developing all these new functions could be seen. When the things they were after bore fruit, that's the happiest moment for technicians.

"... Why is everyone so moved?"

The twins who were neither pilots nor craftsmen couldn't understand why everybody was so touched. They seemed out of place amongst the joyous crowd of students. Hearing the doubts of Ady coming from above his head, Eru replied with a wry smile:

"Because this is the first step towards a brand new type of Silhouette knights. Because it is a path paved by their own hands, that's why it brought so much joy."

Ady nimbly crossed her Silhouette gear's arms, and lifted her head after agonizing over it for a moment:

"Hmm-- I don't really understand. But it's great when you succeed!"

"You are right, but Ady..."

Eru hugged his head, unsure of how to explain this to her clearly.

As the maintenance students were immersed in the joy of their hard work bearing fruit, there was another group that stared at the prototype machine in another way.

"Di, what do you think of its performance?"

It was Edgar and Dietrich-- Silhouette knight pilots. They looked at the result with much thought.

“Hmm, let me think... First, we will be at an disadvantage at long distance. We have to use one arm to control the silhouette arms, but the opponent could hold a shield. More importantly, it could even use a large shield with both hands to fight.”

“That’s right, and it could use 2 silhouette arms without taking risks. To make up for the gap when changing weapons, we would normally use one. It simply doubles the firepower. I don’t want to imagine getting into a firefight with it.”

“Not bad, to be able to defeat your adversary more safely. Its functionality is great.”

“You... It’s dependable in a fight against demon beast, but we could be facing off against that too.”

Edgar said and as Dietrich was about to refute, another voice interjected.

“That’s right, how about me defeating you guys first?”

The two turned their head and saw the pilot of the prototype machine Helvi standing there. The experiment had ended as they were engrossed in their discussion.

“I won’t say that that is impossible, but the machine is only half finished right?”

“That might be so, but I confirmed all the main points during the test. It should be done really soon.”

The layout had roughly been done, so it should be completed in no time. Helvi revealed a resolved smile and her eyes turned sharp.

“If that is the case, don’t you think there are things that need to be done? For example-- letting the strongest knight of the faculty who survived the battle with behemoth test his might against this new opponent?”

Edgar opened his eyes slightly wider. He, Helvi and Dietrich were all survivors of the behemoth incident, but each of them had a different view on the matter.

“Eh, you are right, there will be a need to conduct a mock battle anyway... so you are talking about me? But Helvi, aren’t you a survivor of that battle too?”

“Just barely, me surviving was just a coincidence. Because that ‘boy’ made it in time.”

“Are you feeling regrets over this?”

“Regret over what? I can’t thank him enough for that. I should say... I am curious about the machine made by that boy.”

They watched the prototype machine that was being ferried at the same time.

“I had taken part from the very start, so I know very well. If I pilot this ‘child’ with its new power, even I could beat you.”

“...How scary.”

Edgar didn’t look afraid at all, just a bit troubled. Helvi sighed softly.

“That’s why, after this is done... Maybe I can fight that giant monster to the very last moment too.”

“Helvi... Is that the reason why you took on the job of test pilot?”

“Nah, I just felt that it’s a good thing for Silhouette knights to get stronger. We will have an easier time fighting demon beasts after all.”

Seeing Helvi smiling cheerfully as usual, Edgar felt that she was dodging the question.

“Wash your neck and wait for me, Edgar. I will screw you up.”

Edgar sighed softly, seeing Helvi who was waving her hand off. Dietrich patted his shoulder.

“I envy you Edgar. The first one to fight the new model.”

“Want to trade places with me? I’m serious.”

“If you reject her challenge, she will hate you alright? And of course, I will use your battle as reference.”

Even though Edgar was a little unwilling, he couldn’t hide his curiosity and will to win. The two contradictory feelings made Edgar show a complicated expression.

After completing the structure of the strand crystal tissue that was the hardest to make, the rest of the work proceeded smoothly. The workers followed the plan and completed the movement test with armor on, and experiments like deploying back weapons while moving and firing the weapon while moving. They gradually completed each phase. One month after the walking test, they finally moved on from the prototype stage to the official naming stage. The prototype machine used for technical test was dubbed ‘Tellestarle’-- named after the machine it was modified from.

Tellestarle showed itself slowly from the darkness of the workshop. Its appearance was not much different from the other student machines. As there would be further customization in the future, it looked unrefined compared to the other machines. Only the two silhouette arms on its back emphasized its difference from current models. Tellestarle walked towards the training ground-- its movement smoother compared to the test back then, but it still felt a bit unnatural.

Making its way through the training grounds gate, it found another Silhouette knight waiting there. The knight ‘Earlecumber’ which was covered in white armor-- It had a plainer look compared to Tellestarle, equipped with the standard sword and shield. But it was controlled by the pilot recognized as the strongest within the pilot faculty-- Edgar.

“Okay, Helvi seems to be ready. Let’s begin then, the mock battle between Tellestarle and Earlecumber!! Show us the result of the movement test!”

The pilot faculty students who came in droves to watch the battle cheered after hearing the opening speech. The mock battle of the new model against the current strongest machine, a highly anticipated fight.

Helvi stared at the image of Earlecumber displayed on the holo monitor, focusing herself in the pilot seat of Tellestarle. No matter how powerful the new model Tellestarle was, she couldn’t let her guard down. Edgar and Earlecumber fought that behemoth directly after all. Even though he didn’t defeat the behemoth, he was still a tough warrior who fought on the frontlines until the very last moment.

On the other hand, she and her partner ‘Trandorches’ lost. Just like she said, it was just a coincidence that she didn’t die. Trandorches and Earlecumber were machines made by students, so their performance was about the same. That meant it was a result of the difference in the skills of the pilots.

But what about Tellestarle? It might be an untamed horse that was hard to control, but it had limitless potential. As the test pilot, Helvi had been with it all the way since its engine moaned for the first time, so she knew it very well.

More importantly-- She looked around the cockpit. The joystick she had gotten used to, the display meter that was revamped but still familiar. The seat that fit her just felt familiar to her. Speaking of which, Tellestarle was built from the wreckage of the behemoth incident and modified by students. This machine was constructed from the base of her half destroyed machine (Trandorches). Naturally, there were structural difference between the two machines and less than 20 percent of the original parts were left. Even so, this machine was still the partner she knew for so long to her.

“We can fight together again... alright, we are going, Tellestarle!!”

She stepped on the pedal hard and shouted the name of her partner that was bestowed with new life. The machine responded energetically, leading her back to the battle stage.

加達托亞 Karrdator

Pilots / Kingdom of Fremmevira Knights

spec

Height / 10.1m

Weight / 18.4t

Equipment / Swords,
Spears, Shield, Magic
Armament Culverin



explanation

Mass produced Silhouette Knights of the Fremmevira Kingdom. Designed about 100 years ago, most Silhouette Knights within the nation were this model, making it synonymous with Silhouette Knights in this country. In order to deal with the various type of demon beast in the kingdom, it's performance was intentionally adjusted to be average, with no strength or weakness. The only thing worth mentioning was its great controls.

Chapter 12 - Let's have a mock duel

On the training ground of the Laihiala pilot training academy, two giants faced each other with sword in hand. The iron armor reflected a dull gleam and the sound from the friction of the crystal tissue reverberated in the entire field.

What follows next would be a mock duel, which is part of training and testing. But for the two pilots riding in the strongest weapon of humanity, this was definitely a battle. The atmosphere wasn't relaxing at all as the pilots burn with fighting spirits in the gradually rising tension.

“Okay, are you ready? We will be having a duel next!! Both of you have to adhere to the rules of a mock duel. Bow! Ready!... Begin!!”

With the cue of the referee's command, the two iron giants charged out with a roar.

Basically, battle between Silhouette knights starts with firing off Silhouette arms. When they close the gap, they would switch to melee weapons. Because the Silhouette arms were dependent on the emblem graft engraved on them, they were structurally weak and would be destroyed easily in melee combat, depriving the pilot of a means of attack.

Edgar had seen Tellestarle's back weapon in action. Using two Silhouette arms at the same time and attacking from a distance was a big threat. That was why Edgar wanted to do away with the long distance battle and moved into a melee battle immediately.

But contrary to his expectation, Tellestarle moved forward immediately after the battle started, gradually closing the distance.

What is she thinking? Doesn't she want to use the advantage of ranged attack? But that suits me just fine!

Earlecumber took a strong step forward, wanting to give it a head on slash. But as he was swinging his sword, Edgar realized he misjudged the functionality of the back weapon.

As the two machines were about to collide, Tellestarle suddenly deployed the Silhouette arms onto its shoulders. Helvi who was looking at the reticle displaying before her in the cockpit smiled as her plan worked out.

“I will use this in place of a greeting. The ability to shoot magic rounds even at close distance-- the real value of the back weapon!”

The dual Silhouette arms on Tellestarle's back fired off simultaneously. Even the tough Earlecumber couldn't evade the attack at such a close distance. Its shield blocked one of the shots, the other hit the right shoulder which wasn't covered by the shield. The training shot wasn't strong enough to blow the right arm off, but Earlecumber still lost its balance and its advantage in pressing the attack.

“That's not all!”

Tellestarle swung its blade as it retracted its Silhouette arms. Using its moment, it attacked the unbalanced adversary. The movements were rough, but it was more terrifying than a half assed attack.

Edgar didn't resist the falling motion. He spun to the right and pushed out the shield on its left arm to block Tellestarle's blow. Earlecumber managed to defend the attack, but was almost sent flying as it staggered

backwards. Earlecumber was in such an awkward position because it was unbalanced, and also because of the power behind Tellestarle's strike.

"....!! What terrifying strength, so this is the power of strand crystal tissue!?"

Edgar groaned and leaped backwards to pull away. The back weapon could attack from unexpected avenues, and the strand crystal tissue displayed overwhelming strength. Edgar repositioned himself as he threw out all the known tactics of dueling.

"Eh, really, I am getting used to abandoning common sense, how unpleasant!"

The holo monitor showed Tellestarle had started to advance, coming after Earlecumber. It had given up the idea of a surprise attack, deploying its Silhouette arms onto its shoulders as it forged ahead.

"But I won't back down so easily!!"

Simple back and forth movement will just make Earlecumber the target of magic shots. Earlecumber started moving laterally to the side, escaping out of Tellestarle's attack range.

A heated battle started from the very beginning, which pumped up the audience in the training grounds. Cheers erupted every time the iron giants crossed swords. Unlike the audience immersed in the heat of the battle, the maintenance students analyzed the battle in low voices.

"As expected of Edgar, most pilots would have fallen from the first attack."

"Helvi Sempai is piloting really smoothly."

"Being the test pilot wasn't just for show."

The ones conversing were Eru and the boss. For these two, Tellestarle moving in a situation close to actual battle was as valuable as gold. They observed carefully, analyzing their every move.

The two machines clashed right in their field of vision. They thought the machines would struggle for quite a while with swords, but Tellestarle had an advantage in power, pushing Earlecumber's sword back; but Earlecumber wasn't a pushover either, pulling away from Tellestarle as if he had expected it, not letting Tellestarle gain the upper hand.

"Helvi seems to be relying heavily on the power advantage."

"The difference in power output is significant after all. I think this is the best way to gain the upper hand. To be honest, the controls have not been optimized yet, so she will lose if she relies on tight controls to fight."

The boss accepted Eru's commentary. Tellestarle had overwhelming energy and excellent explosive power. But as the control system had not been calibrated perfectly, it couldn't perform delicate movements, and could only attack in crude strokes. Edgar could see that and didn't take the hit straight on. Even so, Tellestarle which could attack with sword and back weapon at the same time had the upper hand.

"How dangerous! I have to stop the Silhouette arms, it's too powerful!!"

Edgar who was trapped analyzed the situation calmly. His opponent Helvi had grasped the feature of Tellestarle, and used the most effective attack movements to cover for its weakness. Even though Edgar had noticed that the movement of Tellestarle wasn't refined, but he couldn't take advantage of it. If this was a fight between normal Silhouette knights, Edgar would be about to lure the opponent to attack and counter. But it's another matter when battling Tellestarle.

The most crucial factor was the back weapon resulting in the difference in means of attack. The opponent would attack and restrain Edgar's movement with unexpected timing of attack. He had less means of attack, and will lose in terms of strength in a wrestle. It had nothing to do with skills, that's how wide the difference in machine performance was.

The students watching knew that Earlecumber didn't messed up or was giving a handicap. Hence, even though its movement was still crude, the new model that was overwhelming the strongest man in the faculty brought the excitement of the crowd to the boiling point.

Earlecumber was gradually forced into a corner. If he don't take a gamble and take out the back weapon, Edgar will definitely lose.

"I don't like gambling... but it would be pointless if I lose without trying anything."

Seeing Earlecumber in her holo monitor stopping, Helvi mumbled:

"... He is getting impatient. Edgar want to bet everything in the next attack."

Helvi knew her skill was not at his level, so she had to fight by relying on the performance of the machine. It was easy for Helvi to guess Edgar's objective.

"He can't make up for the power output of the strand crystal tissue... he is probably aiming for the back weapon."

If Edgar takes the back weapon out, no matter how vast the gap in power output was, he had a chance to aim for the weak point with precision and turn the situation around with his skills. Because both pilots knew this, the main objective of the upcoming scrimmage was decided.

The two machines pointed their swords at each other and stopped moving. The silence after the heated exchange was like a tightened string, and the tension grew with it. Before they realized, the audience had turned quiet, waiting for the end of the battle with bated breath.

The sharp sound of air intake was suddenly heard, it was Earlecumber revving the ether reactor at full power. That sound was akin to the battle cry of the Silhouette knights, and the tensed situation changed-- Earlecumber charged. Out of all his options, Edgar chose a direct assault. The iron knight dashed with heavy steps which almost shattered the stone paved ground.

"Going head on in such a situation, that's just like you! Good, I will do my best too!!"

No matter how wide the power difference was, if its momentum doesn't match her opponent, Tellestarle won't be able to take the hit. That's why Helvi ordered Tellestarle to advance too. The scene of both machines clashing with a charge was reminiscence of the opening of the battle.

Tellestarle used the attack which was to her advantage, the two Silhouette arms on her shoulders fired at Earlecumber. Earlecumber used its shield to defend while swinging its sword to deflect the shot. The sword mastery capable of deflecting magic shots was commendable, but swinging his sword right before clashing with the enemy meant giving up the chance to attack. Even the audience could tell this. Tellestarle closed in on Earlecumber at this moment and was about to give a mighty blow. Everyone - including Helvi - thought that Edgar who took the initiative to attack being cut down like this was a letdown ending.

Of course, Edgar didn't swing his sword because of carelessness. He had decided to use the sword for defense right from the start. Gripping its crucial shield, it moved its fist near its shoulder to secure its hold. Earlecumber lowered its posture and threw the left side of its body forward.

"... What!? Shield bash!! He wants to clash head on!?"

Helvi sensed Earlecumber's intention at the last moment and kept her sword. She would be at a disadvantage if she use her sword against Earlecumber's shield.

Edgar's plan was simple, even if his means of attack and pure power output loses to his adversary, Earlecumber still had an advantage over his opponent, that is 'weight'. He used speed to make up for the difference in power and charged at Tellestarle like a bullet.

Piloting skills aside, Tellestarle had the advantage in terms of strength-- Helvi had absolute confidence in this and decided to take the attack head on. When she discovered Edgar's motives, it was too late for Tellestarle to dodge. She had already started to accelerate, and had to take the same actions.

Tellestarle raised its shield and the two Silhouette knights collided shortly after.

At that moment, the loud bang of the collision reverberated through the entire training ground. The shields taking the full brunt of the impact deformed, splitting the two machines to the side on offense and the side on defence.

Helvi who hesitated because of the unexpected attack and Edgar who was aiming to clash from the very beginning-- His objective was to get into melee distance, that's why he threw himself into this attack. Earlecumber didn't forego the chance it gained after its heavy sacrifice, lifting its right arm which was still mobile, stabbing into the Silhouette arms on Tellestarle's shoulders.

"You are good!! But I won't fall for that again!!"

Earlecumber's left arm was heavily damaged and couldn't move freely. But surprisingly, Tellestarle's left arm was still working after that collision. The strand crystal tissue was damaged, but still showed its strength, pushing Earlecumber easily.

"What!? Not just the power, even the toughness was enhanced!? But I can't miss this opportunity..."

"Just a bit more!! Tellestarle!!"

Earlecumber's quick attack went over its opponent's shoulder, destroying the Silhouette arms. But that's the limit of his all out counter attack. Tellestarle's seemingly endless strength pressed back at Earlecumber, pushing Earlecumber who was in an unstable position due to the previous attack staggering backwards.

"Ugh! Did I push it too much?!"

"I got this! Edgar-!!"

Tellestarle charged at Earlecumber mightily. The off balanced Earlecumber couldn't evade the attack, its wounded left hand unable to lift its shield. Tellestarle raised its sword high, and was about to hack at the helpless Earlecumber--

But the sword didn't fall, and Tellestarle knelt onto the ground.

It was hard to described the atmosphere in the training ground, maybe 'dumbfounded' and 'stunned' would be appropriate. Why did Tellestarle which was about to deliver the final blow kneel down? Just by looking at the stunned reaction of Earlecumber, it was easy to tell this wasn't the result of Earlecumber's timely counterattack. No one expected this result just as the match was about to be decided at the very climax. No one knew how to react to this ending, and the entire training ground was shrouded in silence.

"...Ah! The mana had been exhausted!"

The shout of Eru who figured it out echoed through the silent training ground.



“Well then, time for the first maintenance department’s after action review.”

Eru announced the start of the meeting with a serious expression. Inside the workshop, Eru, the boss and their merry friends were all gathered here, everyone had an awkward expression. Even Eru who always do as he pleased looked distracted-- he hesitated a moment and peeked at the reason behind the awkwardness. What he saw was Helvi who was squatting gloomily at a corner of the workshop.

The kanji ‘awkward’ could almost be seen coming out of her body. It wasn’t her fault, but ending it so abruptly after such a stellar display, she would rather be defeated in battle. It’s no wonder she was sulking.

It was within their expectation for the prototype to have flaws, but it picked an awkward time to act up-- That’s how one would frankly describe the feelings of the audience. No, the problem only surfaced because of their fierce fight before the conclusion of the battle. But these facts couldn’t console Helvi.

“Ed, Edgar senpai, could you cheer Helvi senpai up...”

“Hey, why me!? Ugh, ahh, I will try my best...”

Eru who couldn’t stand it any longer forcefully pushed Edgar to Helvi’s side. After seeing him go with a selfless expression, Eru turned his head back refreshingly.

“Phew, that should do. Let’s think about tackling the new problem that surfaced.”

“Don’t die, Edgar... Well, the problem is obvious. The greater the output, the bigger the consumption rate, it’s very logical.”

Everyone looked at Tellestarle which was placed on the maintenance platform and thought hard. Using strand crystal tissue to increase the power output led to higher mana usage rate, depleting the mana reserves at a faster pace.

With the Silhouette arms being easier to use, the mana consumption rate was higher than predicted. On the other hand, the amount of crystal tissue didn’t raise by much after implementing the strand crystal tissue method, so the mana reserves only increased slightly. This resulted in the flaw of shorter operational time for Tellestarle. The timing of this problem popping up was bad, but it made sense when you think about it.

“Considering all these factors, the operational time is about half of a normal machine... That is very bad, right?”

“The worst. It could be considered a fatal flaw...”

The point of emphasis for this modification was the increase in power output, installing Silhouette arms and aiming functions e.t.c. Anyway, they were all things that consume mana, so the imbalance of the modification raised to the surface. After years of tweaking, the Silhouette knights were designed to store as much mana as possible, but it also meant the design couldn’t be changed easily.

That might be so, but sitting here sighing wouldn’t help either. In order to not let Helvi’s honorable sacrifice go to waste, they had to think of something to overcome that flaw.

“The main point is that the mana supply couldn’t keep up with the usage rate... But it’s difficult to modify the source-- the ether reactor. Or rather, it’s impossible.”

Even Eru couldn’t do anything about the mysterious reactor. His words made the students around him relaxed in secret. If Eru could customize that too, they would have all fell down.

“What about lowering the output? But even so, it wouldn’t change the fact the structure burns a lot of mana... and lowering the output would be putting the horse before the cart.”

“Another way would be increasing the mana storage capacity... How is the capacity increased?”

“Simply put, by increasing the amount of crystal tissue.”

“Can’t we do that then?”

“If we increase the crystal tissue, the consumption rate would increase too.”

There would be no end to this.

“The strand crystal tissue has an intangible flaw. The amount of tissue didn’t increase much, that’s why the power output and capacity is unbalanced.”

The seriousness of the issue gave everyone a headache, this wasn’t something that could be resolved easily. But hope came from an unexpected avenue.

“How about using your idea?”

As everyone was silent in thought-- Ady who didn’t say anything sounded out. Hearing Ady who was usually quiet during conference expressed her views, Eru asked:

“My idea?”

“That’s right, ‘it’s fine even if the appearance is not human’! We can increase the tissues, but we don’t need to stick with human form right?”

“It’s fine... even if it’s not human... I get it. Correct, you are correct.”

For her, this was just repeating something Eru said. But the one said it was surprised with his eyes wide open, and slowly squint his eyes.

“Ugh, you are correct, but for Ady to enlighten me... I can’t believe it.”

“How mean!! Why--!?”

The boss ignored the raging Ady and Eru who was being chased. Ady’s comment reminded the boss too, and they came to the same conclusion. Being fine even if it’s not in the shape of a human, doesn’t mean you had to use the shape that were inhuman.

“That’s it! Increasing the crystal tissue doesn’t mean it has to move.

By connecting the silver nerves to it, and pushing it into excess space, it would be fine if we could increase the ‘mass’ of the crystal tissue!”

“Ke! I said I am sorry! Kah!... Sorry, I apologize... Alright?... boss, we should maximize the space usage, so we shouldn’t use fiber form but sheets... I think it would be best to employ the form of a sheet.”

Hearing Eru’s proposal, the boss lifted his head.

“Alright, it’s decided. Next would be negotiating with the alchemist faculty and asking for their help. I will go ahead and greet them, leave it to me!”

After finding a solution to the critical issue, the air around the maintenance department relaxed. Eru was cracking his head, thinking of ways to soothe the piqued Ady.

The iron giant made squeaking sound as it stood up. It was 10 meters tall, more than 5 times the height of the humans in the vicinity. The rough armor maintained its original metallic shine, reflecting a dull glow from the sunlight. The sound of its armor clanking grew louder as it moved.

The giant moved its body to check its condition, and nodded at the person at its feet. When it had confirmed all the people in the vicinity had left, it started to move according to the instruction of the people around it.

The crystal tissue covering the arms of the giant started to contract from the effects of mana. Its body tensed and lifted both arms strongly and shoot its elbows to the side. It stretches its arms, shoulders and chest muscles, with both feet planted firmly on the ground --'front double bicep pose'. Next, it took a light step forward, and put down its arms. Its fists meet before its abdomen. Leaning slightly forward, it used all its might to pump its arm and chest muscle-- the position that brings out the best of power and beauty, 'the most muscular pose'. The iron giant kept on changing its pose.

"... What the hell is this... No, what experiment is this?"

"Hmmm? According to the explanation, it seems to be testing for crystal tissue parts that aren't used much."

"Who? Who set such an agenda?"

Looking at the experiment devised by a certain silvered hair youth and the prototype that was concentrating on doing all sort of poses, Edgar complained with a dumb look. Helvi was the one who answered him.

"Well, its fine if it is a proper experiment... Eh, is it fine? It's fine right?..."

"Is that so? Forget about that. Is the testing for unit 2 going well?"

"Yes. The pilot just changed shift, but it is progressing smoothly."

Before Edgar was another Tellestarle named as unit 2, which was doing another set of tests. Other than these two machines with exposed tissues, other Tellestarle could be seen doing all sorts of movement tests.

The experiment ended with the great flaw of reduced operational time a few days ago, but new developments had started because of that mock battle. The flaw itself aside, because its discovery was too dramatic, it made everyone wonder if there were other critical flaws. That's why experiments with repeated and large movements were set to sieve out any more problems. Everyone agreed to the additional testing, but it couldn't be done with just one Tellestarle, so they created more machines of similar models to cope. To do this, the maintenance team worked nonstop after the mock battle, and some were worried about the students being overworked to death.

In the end they created 5 Tellestarle. There weren't piloted by a handful of knight runners, but a team working in shifts to complete the list of experiments. Thanks to this, no major defects were discovered. They also made improvements during this period of time, steadily improving the level of completeness.

Edgar and Helvi just happened to be on rest, and were chatting about how to adjust to the controls. Recently, they had been talking about the new models every now and then.

"... We need to discuss this part with Ernesti too. Hmm? That's right, I haven't seen him much lately."

Speaking halfway, Edgar remembered because of the name he brought up. They didn't see Eru recently, which made Helvi troubled.

“That boy should be watching the experiment here, you can’t even drag him away. What happened?”

“... Did he run into some troubles...?”

Edgar’s expression stiffened slightly, and he looked up at the clear sky--

“I’m not this free usually.”

“Really? So what’s so special about today?”

Ady was hugging Eru and poke her head from behind. Eru dodged her gaze with wandering eyes. Before them was the blue Silhouette armor and many other spare parts.

When Edgar brought up Eru in campus, Eru and his friends were gathered at Tymomen workshop. The development of Tellestarle was proceeding well with the efforts of the high schoolers. With nothing major requiring his aid, Eru who was ‘bored’ immersed himself in the development of ‘equipment for Silhouette gear’.

“That’s right, we are busy, there are tons of things we need to test.”

“You are that free, but you only play with Batson! You only train with Chid as an opponent and don’t go out much, how boring.”

This equipment was designed by Eru and made by Batson. The miniature armor was different from the Silhouette knights. The challenge of making equipment for Silhouette gear spurred their desire for research. The passion of these two even made Ady who was given the cold shoulder kick up a fuss. With Eru and Ady who was playing casually at one side, Batson deftly opened the armor of the Silhouette gear to install the internal parts while Chid watched.

“I’m fine with it though. But you had made so many. What is that?”

“This is called ‘wire anchor’, ask Eru for a detailed explanation... As for its uses, see for yourself.”

Although they made about ten ‘first generation’ Silhouette gear, it wasn’t utilized because of the difficulty in controlling it. It had become Eru and the other’s toy-- correction, training tool. Only Edgar or Dietrich would use them for training. With Eru’s permission, they would visit every now and then.

“Oh yeah, Edgar senpai was complaining a few days ago, saying it was harder to pilot after changing the crystal tissue into the strand type.”

Of course, the strand crystal tissue had moved on to practical application thanks to Tellestarle. It had greater strength, but the controls were also harder, even Edgar had to give up on that.

“Anyway, it’s too pitiful to keep calling them ‘Silhouette gear’, it’s about time for an official name... right, how about Lucy Kimiko Akie Airi Shiori Rinne Yoshiho Ayano Tomika Chitose Sanae Mikiko Ichika!?”

“Too long! pick something simpler.”

“Then use the short version ‘Motor Beat’.”

“Hey, the short version had nothing to do with the name you came up with earlier!!”

“Motor beat... nice to meet you.”

After greeting his own Motor beat, Chid's face stiffened. Oh no, he might have been infected by Eru. He facepalmed himself and shook his head.

"Well, since the name has been decided, time to show off the new equipment. Stop sulking Ady and help, alright?"

Eru finally soothed Ady and got on the blue Motor beat made to his size. He walked towards the yard of the workshop and pointed the arm of Motor beat at the wall that was higher than the building instead of the target boards.

"Watch carefully... Wire anchor, fire!"

The sound of a shot followed the cheerful shout, an arrow shaped projectile flew out from the wrist-- wires were attached to the end of the arrow, which kept coming out from the wrist. The arrow defied gravity and went at full speed towards the top of the workshop, and went over the roof at a sharp corner. The internal mechanism activated, turning the arrow into the shape of an anchor. Eru pulled on the wire to check if the anchor was secured.

"It's stable, next would be... take off!"

The gears inside Motor beat's arm made churning noises. Motor beat was pulled by the wire that was secured and started running towards the wall and leaped. After 'landing' on the wall, it took several steps and ran up to the roof. After twisting in the air, the motor beat used air suspension magic to cushion its landing, stopping on the roof top gently.

Eru commanded Motor beat to stand up slowly, focusing his script and mana on the arrow that was still embedded in the roof. The wire attached to the anchor contained silver nerves, and the script was sent to the crystal tissue installed in the anchor. The deployed anchor changed its shape, returning into its arrow form and was stored in its arm.

The arrow head was propelled by the crystal tissue built into it, using aero thrust intermittently to move. By controlling the direction of the propulsion, it could even change its flight path to a certain degree.

"Amazing, gear.... no, Motor beat got up onto the roof in no time."

Ady and the others who saw the entire process lifted their heads and watched. Even with their physical boost spell, climbing to the top of buildings while wearing armor was a tedious task. And Eru managed to do that while wearing Motor beat which was even bigger. It was something that amazed them.

"Oh-- it went well this time, Eru."

"I had fallen so many times before! Let's try the next one!"

"Ah, so it will fail sometimes... Eh, so you want to bring 'that' here?"

Eru jumped off the roof. Even Motor beat would be in trouble if it fell from such height. It decelerated using air compression on the way down, and used air suspension to absorb the impact, kicking up a cloud of dust. Once it landed, Chid and Ady started dragging something out of the workshop.

They were holding different items. Chid was holding a giant bow, built mainly from wood and reinforced with steel. Behind the bow was a mechanism with gears. Chid looked at the thing he brought out and said:

"Eh, this crossbow is too big... is this a siege weapon?"

"You are right. To be precise, it is the mini version of a ballista."

As Eru had described, that bow was large even in the hands of the Motor beat. It would be too heavy to operate without the Motor beat.

“Why would you want something this big... Ah-- I see. You want to use the Motor beat to operate the ballista.”

“Not only that... Ady? Did you bring the ‘magazine’? Please put it in.”

Inside the cart pushed over by Ady were several box like items known as magazines. It was as thick as a man’s hug, and would protrude out even when held by a Motor beat.

“Simply said, this uses strand crystal tissue on the bow string and loading mechanism, a weapon known as ‘mobile ballista’. By controlling the crystal tissue, you can shoot out the bolts freely.”

“I see. What about this magazine?”

“There are bolts in there and they would move whenever the bowstring was retracted, reloading after shooting out one bolt. As for the next part, it would be quicker to just show you.”

Chid followed Eru’s instructions, inserting the magazine into the front and center part of the ballista. The catch clicked, securing the magazine in place.

After confirming that the magazine had been secured, Ady started transmitting script and mana to the ballista. The strand crystal tissue stretched to the limit, making the unique sound of crystal tissue being pulled. The gear connected to the pulling motion loaded a bolt onto the groove of the ballista. The next control was special: Since the crystal tissue is the bowstring, there wasn’t any mechanism like a trigger. Chid could control the crystal tissue directly in order to fire the bolts.

Chid commanded the crystal tissue that had been stretched to the limit to relax. The bolt flew out with a mighty sound. As Chid was aiming from a close distance, the arrow pierced the wooden target dead on. This bolt was shorter and thicker when compared to its bow. It might be relatively short, but since it was fired from a (mini) ballista, it was closer to a spear with fletching rather than an arrow. Utilizing the power of the strand crystal tissue to the limit, while the bolts fired from the ballista couldn’t match mainstream weapons, they were powerful enough. The result was the bolt piercing the wooden target and pulverizing part of it.

“...Eh, I don’t think we should fire this inside the city.”

“Its fine, there is a really thick earth wall behind the range. Unless you use Overt magic and focus at one point, you won’t be able to break through.”

Eru and Batson ignored Chid who froze in place after firing and chatted idly. Ady who was hugging a magazine was looking at the bolt that demolished part of the target excitedly.

“Oh right, by using the crystal tissue, you can fire repeatedly. Depending on proficiency, you can fire a shot every 5 seconds. A magazine has 10 bolts, so it could be depleted in a minute.”

“Phew! Is that so... let me try.”

Chid raised the ballista timidly. Breathing out to calm his mind, he started firing continuously. the rhythm of the churning and the arrows flying through the air continued for a moment, the bolts hit the target one after another. The target fell apart after the 5th shot, so he shot the remaining bolts onto the wall.

“A portable siege weapon that can be fired repeatedly, how frightening--”

“But it is portable after all, though it is heavy and hard to control. It’s put together with spare parts and has low accuracy, so it needs numbers to cover for its lack of precision.”

“What do you want to do with this, Eru?”

“... Don’t you think challenging the limits and creating new things are something amazing?”

“You didn’t think about how to utilize this at all...”

Chid’s questions made Eru avert his gaze and smile nonchalantly. And so, the Silhouette gear slowly turned into a terrifying weapon without anyone realizing it.

The movement tests of the prototype were about to finish when the alchemist faculty sent word that the ordered goods had been completed. Because the crystal tissue was in the form of a sheet, it was dubbed ‘sheet crystal tissue’. The new material was sent to the workshop one by one.

Past research on crystal tissue focused on how to effectively increase output from the contraction of the tissue, mana storage was only seen as the secondary function. But with the development of sheet crystal tissue as a catalyst, the alchemist had also started researching crystal tissue that are used primarily to store mana. Doing the research from a different angle renewed their drive, they would definitely come up with crystal tissues that have large mana capacity sooner or later.

As for the prototypes that went through a long series of test, the results showed that there were no major defect except for the shortened operation period. The sheet crystal tissue became the last piece of the puzzle to make up for its flaw. In order to finish the project, the craftsmen started the modification project to increase the mana capacity of the Silhouette knight.

“Eh, we are full of drive, but this isn’t working out.”

Their original plan was to install the sheet crystal tissue into the space inside the armor. But when they started researching it, they found the space to be smaller than expected. To avoid interfering with the crystal tissue used for movement, they couldn’t stuff the tissue into any space haphazardly.

And so, they removed all the armor, covered the machine with a layer of sheet crystal tissue, and replaced the armor, using multiple layers. This was done in order to not affect the tissues responsible for movement. Increasing the mass of the tissue meant increasing the mana storage. By extending operation time, it would be a success. But the results weren’t as optimistic. The guys moaned at the sight of Tellestarle.

“How fat, how lame...!!”

Even if they put their sense of aesthetics aside, the multiple layer method posed multiple problems. It drastically increased the machine weight and lowered mobility, even the power of the strand crystal tissue couldn’t compensate for that. The thick armor interfered with movement, harming melee combat ability. The crystal tissue layer could increase defence as a secondary armor, but with the disadvantages outweighing the benefits, they rejected this method.

“Too heavy! Let’s try ‘slim’ him down.”

The next thing they thought of was to limit the parts with multiple layers. Considering its detrimental effect on melee combat, only the armor that doesn’t affect movements of the joints were installed with multiple layers. This method won’t increase the weight by much, but the crucial mana reserves won’t improve much either.

But the method of adding multiple layers was preserved, and was named ‘Capacity frame’.

“This is the limit of adding crystal tissue into the inside...”

“If we increase anymore, it would affect the armor.”

The only way left was to install the sheet crystal tissue on the outside. In order to avoid the problem with weight, they didn't even install armor, covering it with cloth and wires, which was just barely better than exposing it. After researching where humans could store extra weight, they decided on the back or the waist, with the back being the best fit. They thought so too, but it created another problem.

“Really, what a ‘stubborn machine’! Be more considerate!”

They removed the back weapon to install the crystal tissue, but the result of a heavy mass on the back was shifting the center of gravity backwards, affecting melee fighting ability and control. Silhouette knights were built to fight, it would be bad if the pilots couldn't control it properly. And removing the back weapon would invalidate the existence of the new model. They had no choice but to explore other avenues.

“What the hell do we have to do?!”

“Let's do all we can and test everything out.”

In the end, they decided to use the capacity frame and distributed the sheet crystal tissue on the outside. They added tissue that won't affect the balance onto the back, and installed pockets of crystal tissue on the waist too. They had to make adjustment to the equipment on the waist and were able to increase the mana capacity. They improved on the weak points, but there were still some problems with operation period that remained.

In the end, the Silhouette craftsmen gave up on solving all the problems at the current stage. With their technology, they needed heavy crystal tissues in order to ensure a sufficient supply of mana. Everyone agreed that they should wait for the alchemist to develop a new type of crystal tissue with large mana capacity, solving the issue at its roots.

The modified Tellestarles were lined up in the workshop in standby mode. There were five of them with capacity frame, and had a more solid appearance compared to its earlier days. On its back and waist were pockets of sheet crystal tissue. It didn't look like mechanical customization, giving it a feeling of being more human.

“That's it. It's not perfect, but that's the best we can manage! It's complete!”

The feeling of it being a rushed job couldn't be waved off, but the craftsmen decided to change their thinking. The modification to the Tellestarle series was enough to cover its critical flaw, the highest level of completion they could hope for at the current stage. It wasn't perfect, but these five machines still had the potential of being more powerful than the old Silhouette knights, leading the way to a new generation of Silhouette knights.

Seeing them lined up like this, the maintenance department and the pilots finally saw the completion of an entire phase. Everyone had different reaction when they saw the Tellestarle series; some were immersed in a sense of accomplishment, some were glad to be free from work, and some were already thinking about ways to improve the models. But all of them had the same expression of making it through a tough challenge, basking in the pride and glory.

The boss had the same expression and turned to look at everyone, showing his teeth in a brilliant smile.

“Good work everyone! You have worked too hard!! We still have many problems to tackle, but let's celebrate the completion of these fellows! After finishing such a big project, I don't need to tell you what we need to do next, right!?”

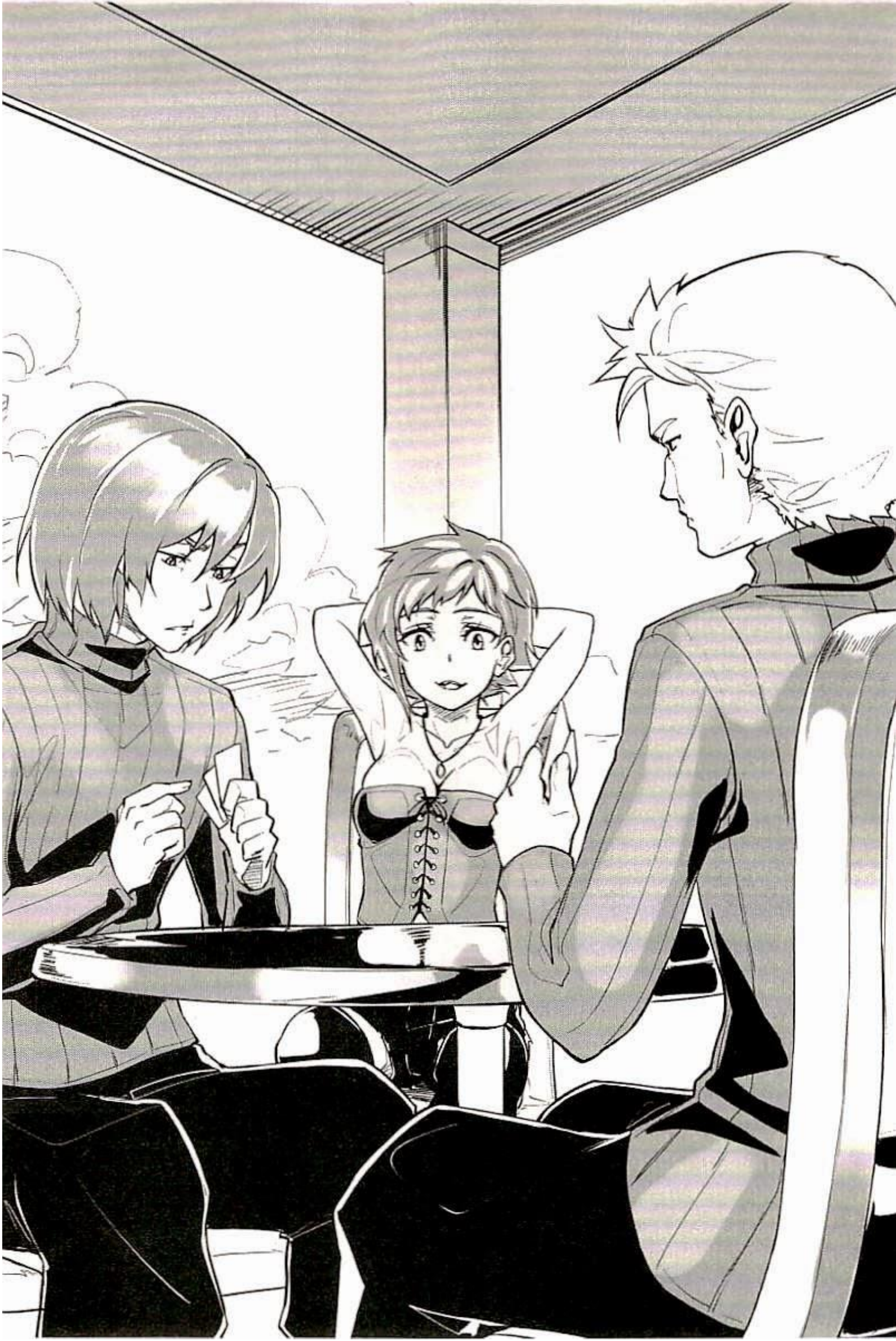
Everyone lifted their hands and acknowledged the boss loudly. They all came to a consensus, the entire pilot faculty held an overnight celebration party.

That scene could only be described this way: When the sky was dim and the surroundings enveloped in darkness, the celebration party morphed into the demon realm. By the way, Fremmevira law dictates that only adults (15 years old) could drink alcohol. Eru and his friends didn't take part, and the party was exclusive to the entire pilot faculty.

In the raving atmosphere with several people literally 'flying' into the air, one figure left silently. he blended into the noisy atmosphere and kept a low profile, leaving the celebration party which was a demon realm in hasty steps and returned to his room in the dormitory.

The sky was dark, a light was lit in a room in the silent dormitory. After returning to the room, he shook his giddy head, drinking water to wash away the alcohol. His roommate was probably still drinking in the workshop. He relaxed and took out a stack of paper from the drawer of his table. There was an organized report on it, stating technology related to Silhouette knights-- including the prototype machine and strand crystal tissue.

He added details of the sheet crystal tissue and capacitive frame onto it. It wasn't exhaustive, but it was enough for others to understand the gist of the prototype. As he felt his dizziness fade away, he felt satisfied with the content he wrote, and kept it back in the drawer.



Chapter 13 - What to do with the prototype machine

Noticing that the shadow blocking the sun was beside his hand, Eru raised his head and looked at the sky outside his window. The clouds turning from white to grey slowly eroded the clear blue sky. He looked at the notebook before him, relaxing his stiff shoulders and overworked brain. His gaze turned to the skyline, watching the heavy grey clouds. The thin clouds would probably turn black soon. As Eru was thinking mindlessly about that-

“Ernesti, don’t look around during class.”

The voice pulled Eru who was losing his focus back. Eru apologized obediently to the teacher who had a stiff expression and looked at the blackboard. The teacher continued his lesson, and with the sound of chalk writing on the blackboard, the voice explaining the history of Fremmevira could be heard. His classmates glanced at him curiously, before turning their attention back to the content written on the blackboard.

That was close, I shouldn’t relax no matter how tired I am. Let’s review my work...

Eru looked at the notebook in his hand once again. It was a pity but as Eru’s classmates were listening to the lecture seriously, he was writing things that were unrelated to the lesson into his notebook. Specifically speaking, it had the sketches of strange Silhouette knight, with legends marked at the side.

Tellestarle is completed, which means the foundation has been laid. With this foundation, I have to prepare a surprise to amaze the king... I have to start with the designs.

Thinking about matters that were obviously unrelated to class, looking at the blackboard from time to time while writing down notes, Eru appeared no different than usual. A normal 12 years old wouldn’t have covered up so perfectly. This was the result of experience-- In a negative manner. No one suspected his attitude towards lessons, and the class carried on smoothly. No, there were some who had noticed.

Hmm- the wire anchor seems fun. I will ask them to install it for me next time. He did say the controls were a hassle, but there must be a way.

I will bring Eru to walk around and eat snacks, it’s decided! All work and no play makes Eru a dull boy!

The two of them got the attitude one should have in class wrong, but it wasn’t a big issue. By the way, although they were like this during lessons, they all had good grades for lessons outside of magic and physical training.

The shadows from the clouds got gradually darker. The boss who was taking a break under the shelter of the workshop looked at the sky and let out an irritated moan.

“Sigh-- it’s gonna rain.”

“Shouldn’t we be glad that it didn’t rain during the testing for Tellestarle?”

Edgar who was sitting beside the table answered absentmindedly. Dietrich who was sitting at the same table looked at his hand seriously while Helvi watched the two of them with a smile.

“It’s troublesome when it rains. There will be some endurance tests coming up soon. Ah, a pair, I’m going to win soon.”

As she spoke, Helvi placed the card she picked and a card in her hand onto the table. There was a reason why they were playing cards. The students from the pilot faculty had hung on until the celebration party, but after that, most of the craftsmen were down from exhaustion and most of them took leave. The newly finished machines could not be activated without the maintenance staff, so the pilots had to kill time this way. The dwarf who was tough amongst the craftsmen-- the boss was still lively, but he couldn’t do much by himself.

“The 5 Tellestarle are officially completed, but from the looks of things, I don’t know when will the rest of the task repairs be done.”

“Ah? There will be progress in the next few days. Right now, we are on vacation.”

The boss answered Edgar ambiguously. Helvi drew a card and discarded the last card in her hand, leaving Edgar and Dietrich to duke it out.

“Oh yah. Boss, my Guyale is still in pieces right?”

“Oh, that’s correct. Come again when we are open for business.”

Dietrich suddenly thought of this question, and the boss gave a casual reply. Since the craftsmen were short handed, it couldn’t be helped. Dietrich who lost to Edgar leaned onto the table weakly.

“Anyway, Di, please help the winners buy some snacks.”

“Yup, a cheap pie would do.”

“I want to eat meat, so buy something with that.”

“Well, okay. Wait... Hey boss, you didn’t take part right!!”

“Don’t be so petty, just treat it as a gesture of thanking me for all the times I had taken care of you.”

Dietrich’s face alternated between green and white before resigning himself, dragging heavy footsteps towards the cafeteria. The three of them looked on with the ease of victors, seeing him off. When that gloomy back disappeared from view, the boss thought of something.

“It’s not worthy of compliments, but that fellow is easier to get along with now. Before this, he would keep yammering whenever he loses, and would definitely play cards with me.”

The boss smiled wryly, the smile under his beard was hard to see as usual. Dietrich’s neurotic and hard to please personality was famous between the maintenance department and the pilots. He was capable, but not someone easy to get along with. They had the chance to work with him often, so they had noticed that Dietrich had become rather low profile.

“He changed after the behemoth incident. Dietrich had mostly changed for the better.”

“By the way, he was the one most passionate about the Tellestarle experiments right?”

Helvi recalled something related too. Helvi who took on the role of test pilot from the very start had the most experience, followed by Dietrich who started piloting Tellestarle after that. Edgar nodded with a surprised expression.

“That’s right, maybe... it was because of Ernesti. Di was the only one who saw him pilot during that incident.”

Edgar answered Helvi with a stern face. Edgar’s expression displayed his passion and commitment as a pilot. It might be a coincidence. It might just be by chance, but his friend having the opportunity to witness the skills capable of fighting against a battalion level demon beast made him jealous; and his friend’s ability had obviously risen, which impressed Edgar. Edgar was a just person-- although he might be too stubborn about it at times. Helvi who knew him for quite some time understood that Edgar would work harder when he sees the people around him put in so much effort.

“Hmm- that boy huh. He is small and agile, if you don’t work hard, he will leave you in the dust.”

The eyes under the slightly curled short hair squinted cheerfully, teasing Edgar. Edgar didn’t know how to respond and reverted back to his nonchalant smile.

“I won’t be left behind so easily.”

“Oh, now that you mentioned it, I have something to discuss with the silver boy.”

The boss suddenly clapped, and noticed the question on the faces of the other two.

“Well, making a new model is all good, but I am thinking about what to do next.”

“Repairing the rest of the machines on campus?”

“I have permission from the dean, so there’s no hurry... but we can’t just abandon the new models after reaching this stage.”

The boss mumbled, his eyes looking at the evening sun. Edgar and Helvi gasped and looked at each other’s faces.

With the bell ringing to signal the end of lessons, stalls started appearing around Laihiala pilot academy. In no time, the students who were dashing out after school could be seen.

“Hey little miss, not bringing your armor along this time?”

“Yes, we will be eating while walking like this today! Give me 3 pies!”

“Alright! What fillings do you want?”

“Let me think...”

The last bit of blue was gone from the sky, which made the people watching it feel uneasy. Eru compared Ady who was ordering her snacks with the stall owner cheerfully with the weather. He thought it would be better if the weather had the same mood as Ady.

“Don’t think too much, it will rain if you drag too long.”

“You are right. But how should I put this, I feel that if we don’t accompany Ady more today, our relationship would turn bad.”

“... Oh. Eh, let’s worry about it after it rains.”

Ady turned around at this time with a smile on her face and hot pies in her hands. *Would it rain first or would she have shopped until she was satisfied--* Eru was wondering things that didn’t really matter.

After this they visited lots of stalls, and when they were almost full, they made a trip to the workshop. There was no special reason for this, they would just go there to see the strange sights from time to time.

“... What are you doing?”

“Eh? As you see, we are playing ‘Kuuklen’. Ara, David is a formidable opponent.”

Under the shelter of the workshop the dean of Laihiala pilot academy was playing a board game similar to chess on earth with the boss. Lauri had the overwhelming advantage on the board, and seemed to be bullying the boss, pushing him to the brink of defeat.

“I am out of ideas on how to turn this around... could you be gentler with me?”

“Kekeke, as a educator, I can’t go easy on you right?”

“This is just a game...”

Unlike the smiling Lauri, Boss’s face looked ready to crumble if he wasn’t supporting it with his hand. He was unwilling to admit defeat, but also had a look of resignation, knocking the chess board with an extra chess piece.

“No, playing games is fine. I am just curious why grandfather is here.”

“Eh? That’s right, there was something I want to discuss with you and David. I wanted to call you to the Dean’s office, but I figured you all might be here.”

Eru didn’t imagine that his grandfather’s thinking was so haphazard and almost fell down. After ravaging the boss and pushing him and checking him on the chessboard, Lauri was finally satisfied and ready to speak. The boss who was treated as a means to kill time sighed, not bothered by this small matter.

“The things I wanted to discuss with the both of you is no other than the new models. David seemed troubled by it too... It is regarding what to do with the new models in the future.”

Eru and the others took a seat, feeling surprised by this sudden topic.

“Frankly speaking, I was only expecting slight improvements. I was wondering what took so long, and the results in the end were beyond my imagination.”

“Because this is truly a new model machine.”

Eru’s cheerful answer made Lauri droop his shoulders.

“I didn’t expect to create something out of nothing. To progress to this stage, are you planning to present it to his majesty?”

Lauri’s words didn’t feel like a question, and seemed more like requesting confirmation. Because for him, the new model with better performance than the old models was more than enough to fulfil the king’s request for the ‘best machine’. Reporting the new model to the king and receiving his well deserved rewards was the natural progression of things. But things went contrary to his expectation as Eru shook his head firmly.

“Oh? I thought that’s why you were working so hard for... is that wrong?”

Lauri’s eyes opened wide from surprise, he then turned his head to glance at Tellestarle.

“I have something else to show his majesty... I am thinking about something that would let his majesty acknowledge that promise. Since his majesty requested for ‘the best’, I have to give it my all too.”

“You are not giving it your all yet!?”

Listen to Eru’s firm statement, the boss who was shocked almost knocked the chair over and retorted. No one imagined Eru’s series of action that defied common sense was just the prologue, which was outside of Lauri and the boss’s reaction.

“Yes, Tellestarle is the foundation... after stabilizing the foundation, I want to construct a grand castle on top of it. That should give his majesty the shock of his life.”

“I think we will die from shock before that.”

“And the boy only knows how to tell the truth, that’s the scary part...”

Lauri changed from surprise and amazement to resignation. He wasn’t the only one, everyone else felt the same way. Lauri took a deep breath to change his thoughts, grunting as he crossed his arms.

“Since Eru said so, this matter is settled. But anyway, since we completed the new model, we have the obligation to report it to the nation.”

“That is natural. So in the end, we will still be reporting it to his majesty?”

Lauri gave a negative response to Eru’s query.

“His majesty is also busy with work. He might have made a promise with you personally, but we can’t settle this so casually. We will probably need to go through the proper channels.”

“The proper channels... you mean the NTR Lab...”

National Technological Robotics Laboratory, known to the public as ‘NTR Lab’. As its name implies, it was an organization that manages the development of Silhouette knight technology. From major projects such as development of new machines to minor details like improvement maintenance techniques, all things related to Silhouette knights were handled by them, and communicated to the rest of the nation. The academy took part in technical enhancement before, so the boss with his background as a craftsman was familiar with this organization.

“Eh,... that might be so, but there are problems with bringing the whole thing there.”

“Hmm? Grandpa Lauri, what’s the problem? This thing is strong right? If we start making a bunch of Tellestarle, the knights would have it easier and the city would be peaceful. To improve to such an extent, the important people would be happy too right?”

Chid who interrupted with questions tilted his head puzzled. His opinion wasn’t wrong, promoting strong Silhouette knights was an effective way of guaranteeing the kingdom’s security. While they were discussing this, a large demon beast larger than duel level was attacking the kingdom somewhere, and Silhouette knight was suppressing them. Silhouette knights turning stronger meant shortening the time to defeat demon beasts, which would reduce the damage level. For the kingdom of Fremmevira which was equivalent to the frontline of the battle against demon beasts, this had priority over anything else. Why would reporting the construction of Tellestarle to the authorities be anything to worry about? Lauri’s smile had a hint of bitterness as he answered:

“It could be done... but making Silhouette knights requires a fixed process. It starts with accumulating small improvements, and a few engineers would use this as the foundation and apply them to the final product. Silhouette knights are strengthened by repeating this process.”

Constructing new Silhouette knights were the responsibilities of the NTR Lab, and in terms of scale, only the NTR Lab was capable of doing so. Lauri remembered this part and continued:

“Developing new Silhouette knights is a national level project, I never imagined we could make an entire new model with the facilities on campus. Well, an idea that could revolutionize doesn’t come along that easily...”

Eru and the boss looked towards the distance, as if they were avoiding Lauri’s eyes. Both of them remembered doing crazy things in order to complete the machine they wanted.

“Eh, that’s it, the problem is that the suggestions we submitted are usually minor, there are no precedents for submitting an entire new model. If we suddenly show up with a new machine, we won’t know how they would handle this.”

When Lauri saw Eru’s smiling face who was ready for battle, Lauri sighed softly.

“Grandpa, what’s done is done, sighing over it is useless. Now is the time for us to grab hold of happiness and take a step towards the future.”

“Well said. Those who have the knowledge and doesn’t apply it, are not engineers. We will handle the things in the future when the time comes!”

“You two are really confident about this...”

Seeing Eru and the boss squeezing out a smile with folded arms, Lauri felt he was a step away from reaching enlightenment.

It might seem like a joke to outsiders, but they weren’t taking it lightly. The boss changed his pose and started speaking.

“Also, applying new technology in practical use is the pride of craftsmen. We would get rewards which would fatten our wallets too. The fastest way would be to pilot Tellestarle to see the king, but regrettably, there is still one problem.”

The boss jokingly gestured with his hands and continued:

“The completion of Tellestarle involved a lot of people, about half the students in the pilot faculty took part. The rewards for completing the new model must be significant, but wouldn’t it be chaotic we had to divide it with everyone who took part?”

The boss had a valid point. Providing new technology to NTR Lab would be compensated with monetary rewards, and that would naturally be divided among the ones who helped develop it. As the boss said, many people were involved in the construction of Tellestarle. They included the proposer Eru, the craftsmen doing the assembly and the test pilots. Even the alchemist who developed new materials, quite a number. But in reality, it's impossible to ascertain how much each individual contributed. Not just the way to report about Tellestarle, just the mountain of problems was enough to make you give up.

“Can I say something? I have an idea...”

Breaking the stiff atmosphere, Edgar raised his hand slightly. Lauri who was preparing to leave ignored the two who were clapping to ‘welcome’ the hero, going into dean mode once again.

“Yes, no matter what opinion you have, do tell.”

“Pardon me. Leaving how to handle the aftermath aside, Tellestarle is not completed yet, but its performance is still better than the current model. By spreading knowledge of the prototype out, it would definitely benefit the national security greatly. Anyway, it would definitely be conveyed to the administration... Is that correct?”

“Yes, that is true.”

Everyone present expressed their agreement. No one thought about making the new model exclusive to the academy. After confirming this point, Edgar lowered his eyes to tidy his thoughts.

“... So... There is definitely a problem with the rewards, but we need to consider about handing Tellestarle over. No, I’m not talking about the way of doing it, I just think the matter would not be over so easily.”

“Anything wrong?”

“Think about the situation when Ernesti first made the proposal, boss. We are used to it, but the technology behind the construction of Tellestarle is unusual.”

After hearing this, everyone remembered this fact that was almost out of their mind and quieted down in enlightenment. If Eru didn’t explain to them directly, they probably wouldn’t believe in this technology. There was one thing they kept forgetting after seeing Tellestarle’s performance: it was still an abnormality in this world. The boss who remembered this point clapped his hands together and said:

“Yah, that’s right, everyone was wondering if the boy had gone insane.”

“So you did doubt me...”

After everyone understood that, Edgar continued:

“In other words, it would be meaningless to just hand Tellestarle over right? They can see the exterior design and imitate it, but it would be hard to explain the interior design concepts.”

All of them looked at Eru. Under their pressure, even Eru was backing off a little.

“... By the way, letting the people in NTR hear the ‘whispers of the devil’ seems like a good idea.”

“Is that how everyone looks at me...?”

“Like I said, we should fully utilize the devil right?”

“... I will cry okay?”

Ah, Eru looks cute when he is unhappy.

Eru glared at the boss but the boss remained unmoved, while Ady seemed happy about something. Lauri ignored them and turned to Edgar. Edgar was looking skywards, seemingly thinking about how to express the idea he already had in words. Lauri who looked through that hurried him.

“I am not sure... if this is the way to resolve this. I think there is a need for the craftsmen of the pilot faculty to explain to the NTR Lab. In that case, asking them to hire all the members involved in developing the new model is a way too right?”

Lauri couldn't help opening his eyes wide. Edgar's proposal was to use their employment as a substitute for the distribution of the reward money. Since the craftsmen would graduate from the academy one day and join the workforce, this was a good career path too.

"This method... Is a grand proposal."

"With their accomplishment of completing the new model and their knowledge of the current technology, they are the ideal talents for the future development of the new models."

This proposal puts Lauri in a dilemma. From the perspectives of teaching proper skills and the well being of the students, this was definitely a win win situation, but the academy would be the one that benefits the most. Which means NTR Lab would definitely negotiate with the academy, which would be another high difficulty task. And it would be up to Lauri and a few other teachers. They were teachers after all, not professional negotiators, so it was easy to imagine how the road ahead would be.

"This proposal is very alluring, but I don't know if it would proceed so smoothly. We will do our best and give it a try... But it is still up to the decision of the NTR Lab."

Since the kingdom would be the one to decide, Lauri couldn't guarantee anything. It would be enough if they can decide their stance in general. Although he had a feeling that the negotiations ahead would be grueling; but as an educator, and his pride in defending his student's efforts, Lauri smiled with a hint of bitterness.

After finally finding a way to forge ahead, the group that was discussing were engrossed in discussion. But two of them, Chid and Ady had a troubled face. They barely understood the contents and were finding it hard to keep up. Unlike Eru whose mental age differed from his physical appearance, asking two real 12 years old to join in the discussion was too demanding.

"Erm-- is there anything we can do to help?"

"It sounds difficult. It can't be helped, we will just watch quietly."

They spent a lot of time with Eru who wasn't like a kid, so they had a lot of chance to take part in such talks, so they were always thinking about how they could help out.

Simply put, because the boss and the others worked hard on Tellestarle, they will continue to do so right?

Ady had a few terms she was concerned with-- new, Silhouette knight, construct, end. Her thoughts flew through her tunnel of memories with these vague terms-- and linked it to the things she was told a few months ago. She suddenly realized something and lifted her head anxiously.

"... Eh, they said kingdom, so you have to ask a great person for that right? We could use that promise right?"

"Hmm? That is true... promise?"

That promise-- The meaning in Ady's words confused Chid for a moment, and he found the answer from his memories too.

"Ah!... Right, this is Eru's merits too."

That was the memories of their conversation with their father. Their father -- Marquis Joachim Serrati asked this of the two of them, 'If he had any contribution, please inform me'. In the heart of the twins, the existence of their father was equivalent to a way out of this stalemate.

"Nah, Grandpa Lauri. We have a suggestion."

“Oh, Chid? What is it?”

Lauri thought the twins would ask some questions at the most, and was surprised they had suggestions. Chid didn't seem to be happy about that, and had the expression of a kid who had thought of a mischievous idea as he voiced out his proposal.

“It would be hard for grandpa and the others to negotiate right? How about getting an important person to be your partner?”

“Oh? An important figure... do you have anyone in mind?”

“Marquis Serrati.”

Chid's straightforward reply surprised Eru and Lauri, while the others felt confused. Some of them knew from previous incidents of the twin's history, but it wasn't widely known. Mentioning the name of such a powerful noble baffled them.

“...! Yes, that's right... If it's Marquis Serrati, he was present back then too. It will be easier to explain to him, and ask him to cut through the red tape. But... will it be okay?”

What he wanted to ask was the situation of the twin's family. They are illegitimate children, and should be avoiding contact with the main family. *Could we really ask your father?* The twins understood what Lauri was conveying through his eyes.

“Father told us before, if Eru did anything, he wants us to inform him.”

I see, so they agreed. So discussing this with the Marquis would be appropriate.

“I see... If the two of them are fine with it, I have no objections. What about the rest?”

The other people looked surprised, and looked at each other when they were asked. Speaking of Marquis Serrati, he was one of the few elite aristocratic clan. Marquis Serrati's territory was next to the Bocuse Sea of Trees, so he would understand the importance of the Silhouette knights' performance. Why the twins mentioned this name aside, if they could gain the Marquis' support, he would be a powerful ally. They looked at each other to confirm, and nodded strongly.

“We have no objections.”

“Well then, Sending the Tellestarle over wouldn't do. How about briefing the Marquis with the documents?”

“Yes, that's a good idea. Can I leave the preparation of the documents to David? Chid, Ady, the rest will be in your hands..”

The twins stood up straight and accepted the task with a pat on their chest. Solving the problem made everyone at ease, and they laughed at the twins liveliness. Tellestarle which was situated in the depths of the workshop watched over this scene.

After the sun set in the evening, the shops on the streets closed one after another. Conversely, now was the time for the bars to open for business. The citizens who finished their day of work came to relax and enjoy their meals, flooding the place in doves. A certain bar in Laihiala academy city welcomed the peak period as usual. Most of the patrons were elderly gentlemen, but there was a strange customer who took a seat in the corner. He appeared young, probably a teenager still schooling. Since he was in the bar, he was an adult (15 years old).

He seemed very familiar with this place, blending in with the atmosphere and drinking beer by himself. As he was about to finish his first glass, someone sat down opposite him. For there to be an empty seat in this bar that was almost at capacity, this meant the two of them had arranged to meet up. That man who appeared was burly and looked like a worker ordered a beer right after sitting down and smiled at the student.

“How rare for you to find me for a drink. How is it? Is it hard studying at the academy?”

The burly man took a swig after getting his beer and breathed out exaggeratedly. The student who already drank a bit replied excitedly:

“Ah-- that’s right, it’s been hectic lately.”

“Hahaha! That’s how studying is. If you can overcome this part, you will be somebody!”

“You are right, but it’s been really bad recently.”

The two of them drank and chat, complaining about life happily. Their conversation became part of the noise in the bar.

“I thought I got over the hill, but I ran into a small problem.”

“Haha, the life of a student is hard!”

Even if they conversed loudly, no one would bat an eye, that’s the kind of place a bar was. Picking on the rumblings of drunkards would lead nowhere. And if you look around the place, they were drunkards talking noisily everywhere. At this point, it didn’t matter if another noisy fellow joined in the racket. These two who seemed to be part of the drunkards suddenly observed their surroundings. After confirming that no one was paying attention to them, they suppressed their voice.

“Right! Really!... That thing’s completion is ready for the next phase.”

“Oh? The students are quite capable.”

The whispers of the two wouldn’t reach the ears of the other people because of the din in the bar. The student’s face was red because of the alcohol, while the burly worker with a beer in hand looked just like a drunkard, but the things he said was calm and clear.

“You can’t underestimate something like passion. Seems that this technology will be done sooner or later.”

“The details? You are not thinking about telling me verbally right?”

The student shook his head, signaling that wasn’t possible. He quietly took out a stack of papers. The cover was plain and unassuming, but the content was information related to the new machine model. The burly man accepted it openly, keeping it in his coat without a word.

“Like I said, we need to have a drink together some time!”

“You got that right! Okay, today I will treat the student who had worked hard to a few glasses!”

“That’s the spirit!”

The atmosphere from before was gone without a trace, and the two reverted back to simple patrons as they toast their glasses. The bar got more rowdy as it got closer to midnight, no one paid them any heed or understood what they talked about under the table.

Heavy rain fell onto the stone paved roads covering the imperial capital Känkänen. The drizzle at dawn turned into a downpour, clouding over the entire city.

The unexpected rain made the residents who were always full of life reluctant to leave their house. The streets seemed to have lost its energy. The boundary between the overcast sky and the stone pavement blurred together, becoming one in the monochromatic background.

Marquis Joachim Serrati was inside his mansion located in the aristocratic district, browsing a document as he listened to the rain outside. On it was a sketch of an alien shaped knight that was the harbinger of a coming storm. It had an air of chaos that would threaten to swallow an entire city and nation.

His crude movement in pressing the bell on his table probably reflected the marquis' mood, it was rare for him lose his cool. The experienced butler who had served him over many years was composed as usual, and appeared in his office faster than usual.

“Master, any orders?”

“Bring this document to Duke Dixgard's mansion as fast as you can. Make you sure you hand it to the Duke himself.”

“Yes, I will arrange for it immediately.”

Joachim handed the documents to the butler and said when after the butler left:

“Duke Dixgard, this might be a bigger issue than we imagined.”

His words were blocked behind the thick doors of his office, fading into the sound of the downpour.

ナイツ&マジック2

Knight's & Magic

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Chapter 14 - Let's head into the storm.

Fuu, fuu, the raging wind howled.

A convoy consisting of several carriages braved the wind coming from the sides, moving along at full speed along the highway of Fremmevira. If the weather was clear, the sound of the horse hooves would definitely be loud and clear, but it was overshadowed by the storm. The weather that had been deteriorating since the beginning of the month could turn into a storm in no time. The rain kept falling during this period of time, seemingly strong enough to scrape up the earth. The downpour exceeded the water runoff rate of the paved roads of Fremmevira. Large puddles appeared one after another which blocked the way.

In this weather and road condition that was not suitable for outdoor activities, the convoy persevered on. Looking towards their destination, the vague image of the largest education facility in the nation-- Laihiala pilot academy which was situated in the Laihiala academy city.

“Really, it’s pouring down hard.”

The dean of the Laihiala pilot academy-- Lauri Echevarria frowned as he looked at the rain outside the window as he stroked his beard. The rain that fell rarely before had been going on nonstop recently. It even affected the progress on some of the classes, which troubled the dean. Suddenly, the sound of knocking on the door pulled Lauri’s thoughts back to the present.

“Hmmm, who is it?”

He walked back to the quaintly designed dean’s office desk and answered as he sat down. He heard a voice informing him there were guests visiting. Lauri thought for a moment, but didn’t recall having any prior engagements.

He was the dean, but Lauri was just the person responsible for managing the education staff, and held no special authority. Even so, there were a few visitors that required his immediate attention. There had been cases of abrupt visits by guests, but most of them were important figures with busy schedules, and would make appointments early in order to save time.

That might be so, but with the terrible weather, it’s no wonder the other party didn’t contact us in advance, Lauri thought. Or rather, to have braved such a storm to journey here, they must have come for urgent matters. Lauri answered hurriedly for the receptionist to usher the guest to the dean’s office.

The guest appeared to be in the vicinity as the door opened shortly after Lauri’s reply. Seeing the guests enter with noisy footsteps, Lauri squinted his eyes, deepening his frown.

“That emblem... knights-sama serving under Duke Dixgard. What matters do you have for the academy to travel in such bad weather?”

Before Lauri were three knights. They were covered tightly in armor with a cape over their shoulders and a helmet under their armpits, so it was impossible to mistake their identity. Lauri identified the emblem on their cape, but couldn’t tell what they were here for.

The knights exerted a unique intimidation and dignity, bowing gracefully before Lauri and said: “Yes, we are from the ‘Red Rabbit knights’ serving under Duke Dixgard.”

The knight standing in the middle introduced themselves. He seemed to be the commander who would represent the rest.

“We are here by the orders of the Duke. First, this is the letter entrusted to me, please take a look.”

Lauri received a package and retrieved a sealed letter from within. Duke Dixgard’s wax seal was clear under the light of the oil lamp. Obviously, the only ones who could use this seal were the clansmen of Duke Dixgard. After confirming again that this was an official letter from the Duke, Lauri became more nervous.

After acknowledging, Lauri started checking the content and his eyes grew wider as he read. When he was done and was about to speak, a flash of lightning dyed the entire room white, and the sound of thunder erupted a short moment later. It stunned the ear drums of all present, followed by the sound of the ongoing rain covering over the silence that was filled with all sorts of emotions.

The classroom was filled with whispers that were suppressed by the sound of the rain.

That thunder just now was especially loud. Although it was still daytime, it was dark because of the terrible weather. The students discussed among themselves how shocking it was in the room illuminated by oil lamps. The teacher at the podium also looked out the window, but continued with his lessons after saying: “How frightening.”

Moments later, the classroom was filled with the sound of the rain. The teacher spoke in a louder volume to be heard over the rain, but sounded weak before the might of mother nature. Despite the distracting atmosphere and the shock from the thunder just now, the students who were finding it hard to concentrate still did their best taking down notes. Or rather, as they couldn’t hear the lecture properly, they had to make up for it by looking at the blackboard. The students were giving their best too.

The morning lesson ended with this subtle balance and was followed by the lively lunch hour. Laihiala students who were basically living on campus would eat at the cafeteria around the academy for lunch. If the weather was stable, there would be people eating out or at their homes, but it was not an option in this atrocious weather. As Ernesti and the twins were heading to the cafeteria, an unexpected guest walked into the classroom in a panic.

That man-- Mathias Echevarria, combat instructor whispered something to the teacher tidying up the blackboard. After the two of them came to a consensus, Mathias walked to Eru immediately.

“Da... Echevarria instructor, what is the matter?”

Eru asked his father who was approaching blankly. Mathias spent most of his time instructing students in the high school pilot faculty. If he was here in middle school, it probably had something to do with Eru-- it’s logical to think about it that way.

“I will explain later. Eru, come with me right now.”

Mathias nodded as he rushed Eru along with his words. Eru looked at Mathias’ unusual demeanor baffled, thought for a moment, turned and looked behind him. Mathias followed his gaze and told the twins behind Eru who was at a loss:

“Ahh, sorry. Chid, Ady, lend me Eru for a while.”

The two of them didn’t understand the situation but still nodded. After both Echevarria nodded at them, father and son left the classroom together.

“What’s with uncle Mathias? How rare...”

“I have a bad feeling.”

Chid and Ady spent quite a while staring blankly at the door the two of them exited from. But when they remembered how crowded the cafeteria was during lunch time they started moving in a hurry. *We will just ask later--* they thought. But they wouldn't find out for a very long time.

When the afternoon lesson began, Eru still couldn't be found in the classroom.

Ernesti and Mathias walked side by side through the corridor quietly.

On one side was a burly combat instructor with his short blonde hair neatly combed; the other side was a short boy with silver hair that reached his shoulders. Because Eru looked like his mother, even taking the age difference into consideration, the appearance of the two were polar opposites. Even so, the aura emitted by the both of them were similar, and they felt like father and son.

They walked against the oncoming lunch time crowd, away from the cafeteria. They moved away from the school building and stepped into the zone where the training equipment were kept. As Eru walked, he guessed the destination was high school, and had a rough idea why they were in a hurry to find him. Eru walked in silence without asking questions. Unlike Eru, Mathias had other plans. He was probably wary about other people overhearing them, and slowed down when they were far enough from the school buildings and everyone else, and said:

“Earlier, an envoy from Duke Dixgard visited father-in-law.”

Eru reacted one beat slower.

“... Duke? Not someone sent by Marquis Serrati?”

A few days earlier, Eru and the others accepted Chid and Ady's proposal to help with the new model. Eru thought that if there were visitors, it would likely be people related to Marquis Serrati. But Mathias' words were out of his expectation, which puzzled Eru. But he swept his doubts aside for now and prioritized on confirming the situation.

“What are the envoys here for?”

“They seemed to be here for the new Silhouette knights models made by you all. I don't know the details, but I heard it would be explained after gathering the personnel involved at the workshop.”

Eru could guess what was the content, but couldn't understand why.

Marquis Serrati was definitely notified, but why did this 'Duke' come into the picture? Was it something that couldn't be solved at the 'Marquis' level?”

Was the aid they asked for difficult to accommodate? Or the new model was hard to handle? Eru was almost lost in his own thoughts, but realized it was useless to consider all this and shook his head gently. When Eru lifted his head, he locked eyes with Mathias. Mathias' usual sharp gaze was filled with gentleness, his drooping eyebrow strengthening this impression.

“You had always loved Silhouette knights.”

Saying something trivial, Mathias patted the head that just reached the bottom of his chest. Sensing that his father's attitude was different than usual, Eru felt it was strange, but still replied frankly:

“Yes, you know that is the reason I am here, Dad. I just didn’t think I would have the chance to be involved with the actual thing so soon.”

“Yes, I am sure you learnt many things in order to do this, and had been working hard. But...”

Mathias stiffened his face and continued. From his expression, Eru realized what his father was going to say was the main point.

“Eru’s new Silhouette knight will cause a big storm.”

This might sound like a prediction, but it was almost a given. Just from the fact a Duke had sent an envoy, it was enough to prove this point.

“It’s not only good tidings, troubles would probably follow.”

Eru could see Mathias’ worries, Eru’s cute face had a hint of bitterness. Eru resolved himself to face a huge crisis, it would be no surprise if the students in the pilot faculty were involved, since they were comrades. But Eru felt guilty over the possibility of dragging others into trouble.

Not just Eru’s action, the current situation was all the result of Eru’s willfulness. The recklessness of a normal child wouldn’t be too problematic, it would just be treated as part of a prank at the most. But things had spiraled out of the scope of a prank.

“But If it was you, maybe you can solve any problem you face alone.”

As Eru was reflecting in his heart, Mathias started walking again. The soft words of his father didn’t lose out to the sound of the rain outside the window, reaching Eru’s ears clearly. Eru jogged slowly behind him, looking up at Mathias. Eru couldn’t see Mathias’ expression, but Eru said calmly:

“But, even if you can do that, there is no need for you to do everything yourself.”

Mathias who turned his head met Eru in the eye. Once again, Mathias’ big hands patted Eru’s head.

“Just follow your dreams to the end, Eru. Tina and I believe in you and will support you. Father-in-law is also on your side. We will back you up if you run into trouble, so don’t hold back.”

“Yes Dad. I will rely on everyone if I need help!”

The entrance to the workshop was right before them. Eru had always walked through this door happily, but it looked as if he was walking towards a battlefield today.

When they reached the workshop, they saw the row of Silhouette Knights lined up against the wall as usual. The difference was the craftsmen weren’t working.

On normal days, they would be running around busily, doing all sorts of maintenance on the Silhouette knights placed on the platform; but they were discussing the sudden news uneasily today. Looking closely, all involved, including the pilots, were gathered here along with the craftsmen.

As they hadn’t heard the explanation, the atmosphere inside the workshop was a mixture of uneasiness and anticipation. Eru was an exception among exceptions, most students wouldn’t have anything to do with a Duke. Most of the students who had merits in the fight had the chance to attend the award ceremony in the imperial capital Känkänen, but that’s about it. This meant Duke Dixgard was someone who is an important figure of society, so the pressure from this summon was exceptionally heavy.

Eru used his short stature to his advantage and squeezed through the crowd and approached an acquaintance. “Boss!” Eru shouted, which made David who was deep in a conversation with Edgar turn his head, swinging his beard.

“Oh, silver boy. Have you heard? Someone contacted us so soon. It’s someone more important than I remember.”

“That shows how high they were evaluating us right?”

In order to block out the storm, the workshop was closed tightly and unbelievably stuffy. The boss fanned himself as he shrugged, while Edgar loosened the harness of his leather protective gear.

“I didn’t expect it to be so sudden.”

“To make this trip on such a rainy day, it must be hard on them too.”

“Don’t ever say that in their presence, Boss.”

The three of them chatted idly when they heard the mumblings around them grow louder. They didn’t know what happened, and only saw an unfamiliar group entering the workshop when they turned their head. Their dressing was obviously unsuitable for work-- they were covered in thick armor, wearing a cape with an emblem on it outside. The pilot cadet’s armor were made from leather that focused mainly on mobility, and was only reinforced with metal parts. With their full armor, they must be knights. The group numbered twenty and all of them had the same attire. Their scale might be small, but they were still a band of knights.

The group marched in with a clanking sound that was louder than the rain. The students couldn’t help taking a few steps back in awe. One of the knights walked in front and just happened to coincide with the students backing away. He seemed to be the representatives of the knights.

“Are all those involved in the construction of the new Silhouette knight model gathered here?”

When they heard this, the students present looked at each other with troubled faces. Who will represent the students to answer the representatives of the knights? The gazes bounced between them before settling at a certain corner. The boss and Edgar endured the stares that were staring holes into their back and sighed in resignation, walking forward like a sailboat blown by the wind. Eru who was conversing with them was also dragged in and pushed to the front.

“This is not everyone, there are still some alchemist involved too. The craftsmen and test pilot are all here though.”

The boss gestured to the rear with his chin. This reply made Edgar hug his head while Eru almost fell. The boss didn’t change his rough attitude even in the face of knights, in some way he was like a big shot. Hearing an affirmative reply, the knight showed an awkward face for an instant. But when he thought about the boss being from the crude dwarves, the knight thought it was useless to correct his manners and decided to carry on.

“Great, that’s good enough. I know all of you are students in the pilot faculty, but what about that child?”

Understandably, the knight was looking at Eru suspiciously. The boss and Edgar wanted to introduce Eru, but didn’t know where to start and closed their opened mouths again.

For the pilot faculty, Eru’s existence was a common sight. But thinking about it carefully, Eru was still a middle school student. The boss who only just realized how strange it was for him to be here was cramping his cheeks. Eru looked at the two who didn’t know how to answer and had an idea why, introduced himself naturally:

“I am the one who proposed using new technology for the new Silhouette knight model, and the one responsible for the draft design.”

“..... This child is joking too much.”

“Eh, no, what he said is the truth. You can ask anyone here or even the dean. Everyone will give you the same answer.”

Despite hearing how convinced the boss was, the knight still couldn't wipe away the doubt in his heart. It might just be his imagination, but the students around him seemed to be looking at the knight with sympathetic eyes. Even Eru himself understood nothing would be done if this went on.

“Maybe you could confirm my identity later. But I am definitely involved in this.”

“... Alright. Dear students, I belong to the ‘Red Rabbit knights’, and am here on the orders of Duke Dixgard.”

The students turned rowdy once again. 2nd only to the king, the one with the highest nobility ranking in the country had sent an envoy. Even though they already heard about this, the impact when the knight introduced himself was still significant.

“My lord is very interested in the new Silhouette knight and want to see it in action. He request everyone to deliver the new machine model to the Duke's territory ‘Fort Casadesus’ as soon as possible. He is also requesting enough crew members to come along to ready the machine.”

In response to the knight's words, the crowd answered in silence. Their tense emotions cooled down instantly. A feeling of doubt spread among the students. In this awkward atmosphere that won't go away, the boss meekly raised his hand.

“Ah-- Can I ask something?”

The knight who was addressing them gave permission with a look, so the boss stroked his thick beard and enquired:

“I have no objections to presenting the new models to the Duke, but the weather is really bad and not suitable for piloting Silhouette knights. Do we have to set off immediately?”

“Of course, it's a direct order from the Duke. After so many classes in the pilot faculty, you should have training in traveling in the rain. This is not a reason to delay, please prepare to leave immediately.”

The knight's face grew stern. Unsure of the their intention, the knights behind gave off a huge sense of pressure. The air in the workshop turned heavy in an instant. But the boss simply shook his head exaggeratedly, and said with a casual attitude:

“No, don't get me wrong. Eh, I admit that traveling in such weather is a pain, but more importantly, the burden on the machine would be huge. No matter how much training we have, journeying in the rain is still difficult, and there is a storm out there. The new models aren't that fragile, but we shouldn't be reckless with them. Since we are presenting it to others, we wish to show it in its best condition. Isn't that better for everyone?”

The knight captain lowered his head slightly, accepting the boss wasn't bringing it up because he hated the weather. But he maintained his headstrong attitude.

“You have a point, but my lord’s order require me to make haste in the delivery. Force marching might result in some problems along the way, but the machine can be repaired after reaching the destination. That’s why we are requesting you all to come along.”

After saying this much, the students couldn’t turn him down. They could reject something if it was impossible. This request might be difficult, but could be done. A bunch of students couldn’t protest the command of a Duke anyway, so they could only do their best. Even though there wasn’t a choice, the boss still sighed and shook his beard when he thought about the effort required.

“I understand, let’s hurry and get ready.”

The knight finally nodded in agreement. The boss turned and started issuing orders to the maintenance department, failing to hide his annoyed face. Silhouette knights which walk like humans would also be affected greatly by the road conditions. If the rain kept pouring and softened the ground, preparations would be needed on top of piloting skills: installing parts on the legs and covering the joints with waterproof material. The well trained engineers shouldn’t take long to finish that.

As the maintenance department worked, Mathias spoke to the knight.

“Would the maintenance team and pilots be enough? They could start the machine up if that’s what is needed.”

Mathias was worried about Eru and asked. Sensing what Mathias was trying to say, the knight gave a clear answer.

“No, the proposer has to come along too. We didn’t think it would be a child this young... Is it really him?... I see, it’s true. If that is the case, the orders is to bring him along. No exception, even if he is not in high school, please let him come with us.”

The proposer had to be the central figure in the development of the new model. The knight who thought so looked at the youth before him, still a bit doubtful. The students and teachers had no reason to lie, but how could it be a child this young? That was how he felt. Eru smiled and wasn’t bothered by the suspicious gaze of the knight.

The situation was getting more complicated than he imagined. Eru felt a bit fazed, but shook his head quickly and pulled himself together. No matter what Duke Dixgard was scheming, Eru’s goal wouldn’t change. The new model was getting its debut. Eru made his resolve to complete it together with the high school students.

Fortunately, the rain eased up while they were preparing and the storm had let up. The sky was still overcast with thick clouds and the rain was still falling. But at least it was not a storm.

The convoy set off from Laihiala academy city. Led by the carriage of the Red Rabbit knights, the student’s carriage behind and the Tellestarle in between their formation. There were limited ways to deliver the ten meter tall Silhouette knights. They could use specialized carriages for transporting damaged machines, or break them apart to spread the load. Silhouette knights would usually walk by themselves, and it was no exception this time, even if they were the stars of the show this time.

The front of the Tellestarle and the rear of the convoy were guarded by the Red Rabbit knights’ Karrdators. There were dangers of demon beast attack along the way, so the important new models were kept as combat reserves, and not committed to immediate battle.

The destination -- Casadesus fort, was situated to the north of Fremmevira kingdom, within the territory of Duke Dixgard. The plan was to take the western Fremmevira highway, and head north partway. The road there was paved with stone, even with the unpredictable weather, it should be an easy trip. For the Silhouette

knights which had to carry their own weight, it was hard to walk on the muddy path caused by the rain. The pilots were also trained to move in wet weather conditions, but it wasn't something they were happy to see.

The rain fell on the Silhouette knights which were traveling alongside the carriages and evaporated on contact with the machine which was hot from its operation. The steel knight dragged its body that was emitting steam and forged silently ahead.

The smooth journey ended when they got off the road as they turned towards the direction of the fort. While passing through a trail bashed through the forest, they heard a weird sound that was obviously not a Silhouette knight.

"That sound... Tch, it's a demon beast. All units watch the surroundings! Defensive formation!"

The low grumble of the earth rumbling continued. In kingdom of Fremmevira, there were two types of existences that will make such a sound: either Silhouette knights or demon beast. For Silhouette knights, the sound of the parts churning should be audible. If not, the thing that would suddenly emerge from here would be demon beast.

The source of the noise was obviously approaching them. Estimated to be at least duel level scale -- demon beast that required a Silhouette knight to fight them. There might be several of them too. The battle hardened knights aside, the horses pulling the carts were just normal horses, the approach of unknown creature made them panic. The driver grabbed the reins desperately, preventing the horses from running out of control. But the horses were still in disarray, slowing down the progress of the convoy.

The Silhouette knights surrounded the slowing carriage, taking a defensive formation against the forest around them. With the demon beast making such a noisy entrance, there would definitely be movements in the forest. They took action assuming this, but the forest remained still despite the noise getting closer.

"...No, it's coming from around us... it's from below!? Damn, how is this possible!?"

One of the knights noticed the direction the rumbling was coming from -- and 'that' appeared too. In the middle of the Silhouette knights' formation, the earth suddenly split open and something thin burrowed out.

It maintained its momentum and drew an arc in the air, crushing the rocks when it touches the ground, burrowing out of sight. There seemed to be no resistance against its movement when it broke through the ground that was paved with stone like a fish leaping in a pond. What appeared was as thin as a rope-- a rope with a one meter diameter and twenty meter in length.

Following its lead, demon beasts burrowed out of the ground one after another, a herd of demon beasts started moving parallel to the convoy. There were about a dozen of them, shattering the ground as they moved on the stone paved road.

"To attack at such a place! This is bad, if we stop here, they will hit us from below!"

"Silhouette knight team! Change formation..."

Before the knights could react to the attack coming from an unexpected direction, the demon beasts gained the initiative. The beasts split to either side, jumping through the air in an arc towards the carriages. With its tip strong enough to shatter boulders, it destroyed the wooden carriages and the armor on the knight as if it was nothing. Some of the demon beasts pierced through the center of the carriage, the others attacked the horses, tearing them to pieces in no time and disappearing underground. The carriage that lost its propulsion force skidded for a moment before falling over, becoming an obstacle for the ones behind.

"We will be wiped out if we stop! Get out of the carriage..."

The knights attempted to fight back in the chaos. But as if mocking their efforts, the situation changed again. A Karrdator lifted its sword, moving in to help, but was stopped when the ground around its feet changed suddenly. The ground bulged and a humongous demon beast much larger than the others emerged from the below.

“What, what is that...!”

The ones witnessing this scene were in mortal danger, but they couldn't help standing there stunned for a few seconds. The moment the demon beast showed up, screeching noise of hard materials scraping against each other could be heard.

Its shape was like a thin rope similar to the other demon beast, but its diameter exceeded 6 meters-- more than half the height of a silhouette knight. The front was covered with lots of shell armor, overlapping with each other and spinning at high speed, built just like a tunnel boring machine on earth. The spinning armor grinded everything in the path of the demon beast into pieces and into its body, be it ground, stone or Silhouette knight.

The Karrdator's legs were shattered by the demon beast's onslaught in an instant. After losing its legs, the Karrdator's upper body was tossed into the sky, and tumbled when it fell onto the ground. At the same time, the giant demon beast and its smaller counterparts touched the ground after flying in an arc through the air, burrowing underground with a pile of dirt in its wake.

The sudden destruction of a Silhouette knight was a huge blow for the knights and students, but they didn't have time to just stand there.

“Abandon the carriage! Run! You will be swallowed from below if you stop!”

The rumbling sound mercilessly approached the destroyed carriages and the ones preparing to carry the injured. Even with their high degree of training, the knights were helpless against the enemies hiding underground. They ground their teeth anxiously, but that only made them more frustrated without solving anything.

“Damn it! Demon beast bastards! Look what you had done!!”

The casualties weren't just the knights, the students on the carriages were also attacked and several students were dragged in. The survivors dragged the raging boss from the carriage in a hurry. The encirclement of the demon beast drew closer with each passing second, the chaotic group was forced to the edge. At this stage, the knights and students who had left the carriages finally composed themselves.

They paid attention to the ground underneath them ready to attack, planning to strike the moment the beasts popped up. Among this group that was screaming their heads off was a short student with a strange weapon in each hand, Ernesti.

“Dune worms... another troublesome fellow.”

Shaker worms were a type of gigantic worm like demon beast. The front end was tightly covered with small pieces of shell, forming an end which overlapping armor that spins to grind through the ground, pushing the dirt into its body, a living tunneling machine. They used the intestines within them to digest the beings within the earth, absorbing nutrients. The unused parts were expelled out behind, which propelled the worm forward. More importantly, it could attack from underground which was hard to defend against, a demon beast known for being hard to handle. Eru recalled the information of these demon beast and felt baffled.

“But the shaker worms shouldn't be bigger than 2 meter in diameter... What is that thing? Some sort of leader?”

“Who knows! And why are you so calm!”

“Alright, don’t be so loud, boss. It’s hard to handle them when they are underground. But they are noisy when they move, so we can know its general location from the sound.”

The boss shut his mouth and gritted his teeth so hard it was almost audible. He was full of wrath, ready to wield the hammer in his hands. If possible, he wanted to smash the demon beast’s head in personally.

“That’s how it is. So boss, please back off a little. Get away from me.”

After hearing Eru say that, the boss didn’t bother answering and sprinted at his top speed. The tremors underground also approached speedily, splashing the water puddle around Eru’s feet. Before the boss who was turning his head back as he ran, the shaker worm burst out right next to Eru’s feet. The scene made the boss tense. He didn’t think the shaker worm would swallow Eru so easily, it was still bad for the boss’ heart.

Eru ignored the worried boss, casting Aero Thrust to leap the moment the shaker worm flew out. The shaker worm stretched its body, chasing after Eru with amazing speed. But Eru accelerated in mid air once more, shaking off the demon beast’s pursuit. He maintained his posture and extended the gun staff Winchester in his hands.

“Welcome, taste this!”

Shaker worms could burrow freely in any direction underground, but they couldn’t change their momentum once they were in the air. The two Winchesters fired repeatedly at the front end of the demon beast that was covered tightly with shells. The piercing lances pelted the dune worm and exploded on impact.

Even though the shell armor of the dune worm was powerful enough to shatter boulders, it couldn’t withstand the consecutive magic attack. The pinpoint attack blew up the armor, and the subsequent spells entered the hole and imploded inside. The intense pressure burst the body from the inside. About 20 percent of the front end of the shaker worm exploded, breaking into pieces in midair. A second later, the demon beast stopped all signs of life, the body parts stabbing onto the ground.

“Sorry for the wait.”

After confirming the shaker worm exploded, Eru did a flip and landed. The air suspension spell splashed the water puddle and mud, absorbing the landing impact. Eru then ran to support the other students and knights against the shaker worms attack.

In order to deal with the demon beast attacking from underground, the knights and students didn’t use a close formation, and spread out instead. The thing they had to watch out for was the attack coming from beneath their feet, so they observed the ground intensely.

“Be careful of tremors! Run if you feel they are coming, don’t stop!!”

“Coming, watch your right!”

The shaker worms burst out from the ground, attacking the people trying to dodge them. The shaker worms were powerful underground, but if they wanted to attack creatures on the surface, they had to burrow out from the ground. If they burrowed out of the ground too fast, they would be exposed defenselessly in the air. That was the chance to attack.

“Damn worms! Don’t look down on humans!!

The students and knights were in disarray after the surprise attack, but were countering fiercely now. Every swing of their staff shot out a fireball, just like crimson flowers blooming in the rain. The shaker worms hit

hard by the explosion fell heavily onto the ground, there were some that simply exploded in mid air. The knights and students delivered a final blow before the shaker worms could escape underground.

The skin of the shaker worm was tough from the abrasion against the ground, but it was weaker when compared to the armor at the front end. The boss charged at a shaker worm that was downed by a fireball and smashed his hammer down with all his might.

“You dare lay a hand on my men!?”



This hammer blow used the powerful muscles of the dwarves to the limit, breaking into the area not covered by shell armor. The hammer smashes with incredible momentum, splitting the hide of the demon beast and digging into the inside. The impact permeated through the insides of the worm, turning it into mush as it was broken into two. Without organs to emit sound, the worm spasmed soundlessly and collapsed.

The boss confirmed the worm's demise and pulled out the gruesome hammer that was embedded inside the demon beast's body. He swung it around and readied himself.

"Come at me bro! Next! Hell, all of you come at me! I will send all of you flying!!"

With his mighty aura, both the demon beasts and the students were afraid of him.

The small shaker worms were defeated with the consecutive attacks from the knights and students. They could handle the small sized demon beast thanks to the effort of the Silhouette knights team.

About some distance away from them, the giant shaker worm dubbed 'leader' by Eru was rampaging around.

When the Silhouette knights team realized the leader was more interested in Silhouette knights than humans, they immediately pulled away from the students. The intelligence of shaker worms were low, so the leader took the bait and was lured into the forest.

With the diameter more than half the size of a Silhouette knight, the forest and ground were ravaged. the woods which obstructed movement was a disadvantage for the Silhouette knights. Even though its intelligence was no match for humans, no one could fight against the leader. Despite knowing they were in a bad situation, they still pulled the battle away from their traveling companions.

"Damn it--!!"

Tellestarle one piloted by Helvi charged forward as she roared. The two back weapons deployed on her shoulders moaned and fired a series of magic shots. It hit the body of the leader directly, but as expected of a colossal beast more than a hundred meter long, it was tough and didn't seemed affected.

"What's with this! Not taking damage despite getting hit, isn't this cheating!?"

Against the leader that was twisting its thick and long body as it moved, the Silhouette knights could only attack sparsely. The enemy was too large, the damage the magic shot could deal was limited. With the Silhouette arms ineffective, they could only rely on the swords of the Karrdator. But the slashes were not very effective against the leader too.

Compared to the weak attack of the Silhouette knights, the strike of the leader was deadly. A Karrdator that was almost caught by the leader raised its shield to parry. The surface of the shield shrieked against the body of the leader spraying out lots of sparks. The shell spinning at high speed ground away the shield into shreds.

The Karrdator was sent flying from the collision, lucky to lose just its left arm and shield. An ally ran to the fallen machine.

"Are you okay!?"

"Ugh!... The shield and left arm are gone, but I can still move. I can still swing my sword!"

"Tellestarle, rally to me!"

Edgar used the sound amplifier built into his machine to shout over the din of the leader rampaging through everything. The Tellestarle team sneaked through the lashing body of the leader, gathering at the side of

Tellestarle two piloted by Edgar.

“What’s the plan? Any good ideas?”

“Yes. Spreading our attacks are ineffective, let’s concentrate our firepower. Everyone prepare to attack head on with ‘quadruple arms mode’. We will stop this thing.”

Although the plan was to concentrate firepower, but they didn’t expect Edgar to suggest a frontal assault. The Karrdator pilots would suspect that he wasn’t right in the head or reject his proposal. But the students believed the new models could accomplish this objective. They smiled brilliantly in their pilot seats, nodding firmly to expressed their acknowledgement.

“Alright, let’s do this! Show them the power of Tellestarle!”

The Tellestarle sheathed their melee weapons and threw away their shields. They drew the Silhouette arms hanging from their waist with each hand and deployed their back weapons. With 4 Silhouette arms in place, this was literally the ‘quadruple arms mode’. This showcased the capability of Tellestarle to use multiple Silhouette arms at the same time.

With multiple Silhouette Knights concentrated at a single spot, it roused the interest of the leader who locked on to them and attacked... Seeing the Tellestarle congregate in the way the tumbling beast was heading, a Karrdator pilot warned:

“What are all of you doing!? It’s dangerous, disperse now!”

“We are concentrating our Silhouette arms to attack! If that fellow retreats, don’t let it get away!!”

The Tellestarle stood in a row as if to welcome the leader, aiming the reticle on the holo monitor at the center of the leader’s maw. It was at a distance where they couldn’t miss.

“Fire--!!”

Under Edgar’s command, the five Tellestarle acted immediately. The total of twenty Silhouette arms, equivalent to the firepower of ten or more Silhouette knights fired off at the same time. Backed by the large mana pool from the capacity frame made from sheet crystal tissue, the flames shot through the ever falling rain.

The magic shots with fiery tails plummet onto the leader simultaneously, the carefully aimed magic bullets went directly into the leader’s maw. No matter how indiscriminate it was about food, it couldn’t eat Overed level spells. The front end of the leader was covered in a blooming brilliant fire. The Tellestarle kept on pouring out its concentrated fire, destroying the shell covering the worm’s front end. This forced the rampaging leader to slow down.

The leader squirmed painfully. The explosion made the giant beast burrow underground in an attempt to escape. But the magic attack damaged the front end greatly, preventing it from digging into the ground. The colossal body just wriggled on the ground there in pain.

“Now is the time, attack! Finish it off, don’t let it escape!!”

No one held back on the vulnerable enemy. The Karrdator raised their swords and spears to attack; the Tellestarle exhausted a lot of its mana, but they squeezed out a last spurt and charged in with melee weapons, slashing at the wounds made by the magic barrage. The leader that was struggling to escape was in tatters in no time.

At this moment, a Tellestarle plowed down the halberd in its hands mightily. The strand crystal tissue made a melody similar to string instruments as it flexed to exert more power. The high speed and centrifugal force plunged the halberd into the body of the demon beast, splashing its body fluids all over, mixing into the mud.

The leader could not withstand the blow and split into half. No matter how strong the leader was, this was a fatal blow. The lifeless body crumpled onto the ground with a bang and stopped moving.

The machines that took down the powerful demon beast raised their arms in celebration. But they were only immersed in the joy of victory before heading back to the place they were ambushed to support the knights and students. But when they walked out of the forest, most of the shaker worms had been vanquished under the wrath of the knights and student's counter attack. In the end, the leader was the hardest to handle.

And so, the roads became peaceful once again.

"Sigh, the stinky worms caused as so much trouble."

After defeating all the worms, everyone finally relaxed and the boss complained with a stinky face. Before him was the carriages that had turned into wreckage, and the carcass of the horses that were nothing but bones.

"Can we salvage enough carriages to ferry everyone?"

"No way, the damage can't be repaired easily. No matter how much we rushed, it would be great if we get half of them working. We are Silhouette craftsmen, not great with wood work."

The knight who asked expected as much and crossed his arms troubled. For them, losing most of the carriages was the biggest loss in this battle.

"We have no choice, prioritize sending the wounded. Let the carriages that can still move ferry them to fort Casadesus. The carriage is fine, but there are no horses? Let the Silhouette knights pull it. There is a village a short distance from here, we will go there first. It would be great if we can borrow some means of transport there..."

Everyone followed the command of that knight and started moving. The boss kicked the carcass of the worm grudgingly, but that didn't help at all. The only thing they were thankful of as they walked was the rain letting up.

When the group reached the village, they still couldn't find means of transport, so they had to wait for fort Casadesus to send carriages to pick them up. They encountered demon beast on several occasions, but they were small compared to the leader and were kicked aside by the Silhouette knights. And so, although it was several days later than planned, the students and Tellestarle finally made it to fort Casadesus.

"Alright, everyone start the inspection of the Tellestarle! Pay extra attention to the back weapon!"

The boss and the others started inspecting the machines immediately after moving into the workshop. After fighting an unexpectedly large beast, the Tellestarle required a full check up. The boss led the maintenance department and repaired the machine with care.

The craftsmen in the fort watched the scene curiously. They had a rough idea of what happened. They were torn between doubt and anticipation at first, but was awed when they saw the new models in the flesh. The knights who escorted them were especially impressed, with many hoping the Tellestarle would be mass produced, or at least modify their machines with similar functions. They quietly looked forward for that day to come, but for now, they quietly watched over the fruits of their labor.

Fort Casadesus lived up to its name as a fortress, the workshop was much larger than the one on campus. The Karrdator of the red rabbit knights lined up in a row. With the Tellestarle standing beside them, it was a majestic view.

A person leaving a silver trail behind made his way through the machines. It was Ernesti who looked like he was dancing. He wasn't a craftsman and didn't have anything to do while the inspection was going on, so he was just strolling around. He looked at the rows of Silhouette knights and had a smile ten times more brilliant than usual.

"The hangar bays are awesome, it's so wonderful to have so many Silhouette knights..."

A knight looked towards Eru who was praising the wonders of this world. In the eyes of outsiders, Eru looked just like a child excited to see a Silhouette Knight. The knight smiled gently and told him:

"The Duke is looking for you, could you come with me?"

But Eru who turned his back didn't look like a child. Describing with an example, he looked like a development supervisor about to report to the department head, his expression a mix of confidence, uneasiness, passion and weariness.

Pushing the time back to before the students set off from Laihiala academy city.

Laihiala academy city was formed with Laihiala academy at its core. There's residence and shops. In the streets with buildings constructed tidily on either side, a man was rushing through the pavement. The storm had moved away, but the rain was still falling hard. The man finally reached a certain building. It was a place situated at a corner of the street with a plain appearance. It didn't seem to be a shop, and was probably a residence. The man opened the locked door with practiced hands and relaxed after entering the place.

"What made you rush here in this rainy weather?"

The woman at the other end of the room asked. The man went straight to the point as an answer.

"Emergency report from 'hidden rat'."

The stern eyes of the woman squinted, giving off the impression of a sharp blade. The man looking at her had the illusion of suffocating.

"What is it? Did the student start a revolution or something?"

"Duke Dixgard seemed to be eyeing that thing. We received report he had summoned them over with haste."

A hint of bitterness flashed across his face, but no further emotion was shown. She leaned onto the chair, folding her arms in deep thought.

"... He beat us to the punch. I heard it wasn't finished, that's why I decided to wait and see, this is bad."

"I heard 'that thing' had already set off with some of the students towards the Duke's territory. We have been had."

Hearing this, the wrinkles that were starting to become obvious multiplied. She took a pile of documents from her desk and tossed it at the subordinate standing beside her.

"Hmmp, nagging like this won't help. Sent this report back to HQ at once. Don't forget to add in that this is to be given to 'his majesty' immediately."

This was probably a routine matter, the subordinate caught the documents skillfully, expressed his acknowledgement before running out of the room.

“... Alright, no time to play around. Depending on the judgement by his majesty, We might need to move out.”

“Act directly... His majesty is...”

“Steel yourself. We need to prepare too, recall everyone immediately.”

She answered with resolved in her eyes. The man nodded without a word and left the room. Shortly after, the only one left in the room was just her. There was no telling what she was thinking about, but from her serious expression, it wasn't something pleasant.

“...Alright, seems like things are going to get busy.”

Unexpectedly, there was a hint of joy in her words, contrary to the contents of what she said.

A week had gone by since Ernesti left for fort Casadesus together with the students from the pilot faculty.

The boys and girls of Laihiala academy walked in the rainy streets with their rain equipment. There was some time before lessons started and the students living in the city were starting to leave for school.

The figures of Batson, Archid and Adeltrud could be seen among the students commuting. In the midst of the students chatting happily, the moody twins appeared out of place.

“Really! How long is Eru going to stay there? From what we heard, he should already be back.”

“That's right! Ugh, if this goes on, there would a deficiency in vitamin Eru...”

“What vitamin is that...”

They heard it would take about a week to make a round trip to Casadesus, but despite waiting so long, Eru didn't show up. The primary reason was their encounter with the shaker worms which threw a wrench into their schedule, but they couldn't tell the details. In this world with no long distance communication, they had no choice but to wait.

“But Eru left without us, is he taking our friendship too lightly?”

“We helped in making Telle-chan too!... Though we were just watching from the side.”

“How long are you going to complain about this?”

The twins only found out about Eru heading for fort Casadesus after the fact. After the behemoth incident, being left behind yet again filled them with frustration with nowhere to vent. The circumstance was different from last time and couldn't be blamed on Eru since it was so sudden. But the twins wouldn't listen, and you couldn't really fault them for that. But they were not high schoolers, so they couldn't barge in as they pleased. Since they could only wait helplessly, Batson was getting tired of consoling the gloomy duo.

“Like, I, said, Eru is gone and there's nothing we can do about it.”

Listening to the same phrase said by Batson repeatedly for the past week, Chid crossed his arms dejectedly, while Ady who was at the peak of her anger made up her mind about something and waved her clenched fist.

“No, we can’t give up! We have to pick him up ourselves! Unlike before, we have Silhouette gears right!!”

“... Then where is our destination?”

Unexpectedly, the one who pointed this out calmly wasn’t Batson, but Chid.

“Eh? Erm... I heard he is in Duke Dixgard’s territory.”

“Where exactly? The territory is huge, and we don’t know the way there too.”

Ady groaned and turned stiff with her fist raised. Even if the Silhouette gear’s speed exceeded horses, it’s pointless without knowing the destination.

“I can’t accept this either, but he probably will be back soon. We just have to wait.”

Chid still sounded unhappy, Ady pouted and turned silent.

“... Eru... After you come back, I will punish you like a pillow.”

Hearing Ady’s mumblings made Chid forgot about his anger for a moment. He remembered that Eru needed a lot of effort to calm down his sister and looked up into the sky. As for Eru in fort Casadesus, he felt a sudden chill.

And so, they spent their days waiting gloomily. The story progressed a few days later when the students from the pilot faculty finally returned to Laihiala academy city.

The convoy passed through the city gates of Laihiala academy city. The Karrdator Silhouette knights that were acting as escorts moved away from the carriages and entered a workshop near the city gates. The carriage continued advancing along the road, going all the way into Laihiala pilot academy.

“Oh, our nostalgic home sweet home.”

“It’s only been a week or so, boss.”

“I meant it metaphorically, asshole.”

Shaking their limbs stiff from the long journey, the group from the pilot academy, including the boss, dismounted. The desolated workshop regained a bit of life.

But the group was missing things they had when they set off. First, none of the new model they brought to fort Casadesus were with them. The one escorting them back was the Karrdators from the red rabbit knights, and they had parted ways at the city gates. They came back empty handed. Not just that, everyone here was a student of the pilot faculty. The short youth who accompanied them wasn’t with the team.

With the end of the lessons, school was out. Evening had come and the sun had set behind mount Aubigne. Inside the dormitory of the middle schoolers, Stefania Serrati was doing her homework in her room. She flicked her blond hair that got in her way behind her, writing silently.

When she had solved most of the problems and was about to take a break, there was a sudden guest visit. She thought it was a friend, but the knocking was hurried, which made Stefania dismiss that possibility. She walked to the door a bit confused. Stefania was the student council president, but the related work should had been completed. Thinking there was some urgent matter to handle, she opened the door with doubts in her mind.

“Onee-sama...! Please help us!!”

Seeing her younger siblings looking so worked up, Stefania opened her eyes wide and stood there frozen stiff.

Tiffa did not estrange her siblings of a different mother, ushering them into her room. She thought with a smile: “How rare this is.” The gap between them had faded and they were on good terms, but this was the first time they visited Tiffa’s room.

But they didn’t seemed like they were here to play. Unlike the brother who always showed an irate attitude, just by looking at her sister who couldn’t keep her thoughts to herself, Tiffa could tell they wanted to ask for something. Tiffa wanted to serve them some beverages, but Ady acted first.

“Onee-sama, you are the only one we can rely on!!”

“Alright, I will listen to you, calm down. I will prepare something to drink, please wait a moment.”

Using the chance while Chid was soothing Ady, Tiffa made some red tea. After the twins drank the tea, they cooled down a little, but they still went straight to the point.

“... The boss and the others are back from the fort visit, but Eru... Eru isn’t with them!!”

The expression of Tiffa who was smiling warmly at the beginning turned serious gradually. After she heard about the completion of Tellestarle, contacting their father Marquis Joachim Serrati, the summon by Duke Dixgard and the students returning, Tiffa lowered her gaze in deep thought.

“Is that so... that incident back then had turned to this...”

Tiffa didn’t know what plans their father had, but Eru was definitely dragged in. Tiffa and the rest was saved by Eru’s quick actions, so it was her turn to repay him this time. She made up her mind and stood up with a resolved expression.

“I understand, let’s go.”

“Onee-sama?”

Ady looked at her in surprise.

“Let’s visit our father. He should be in Känkänen’s mansion... we have to at least ask why.”

Hearing that, Chid and Ady nodded firmly and stood too.

After deciding the objective, Tiffa acted fast. The next day, she abused-- correction, used her authority as the student council president to the limit. Using the excuse of an important family matter, she stepped over the sighs and tears of the teachers and student council members and brought Chid and Ady along towards Känkänen. When her sister was asked about this incident some time later, she commented: “... I thought it would not be wise to go against Onee-sama.”

That day, the storm that should have passed fell on the Serrati residence in Känkänen once again, causing chaos. The servants couldn’t stop the daughter of the Marquis adamant on walking in, and rushed to inform the master of the house. It wasn’t clear if they were lucky or unlucky, but Joachim happened to be in the mansion, and the trio was brought to his study room.

“Why the sudden visit? Tiffa, you should have school today, what are you doing here?”

Seeing his daughter acting so agitatedly, Joachim questioned the moment he saw her. When he saw Chid and Ady behind Tiffa, his frown became deeper.

“You all...”

“Father, after seeing the both of them, you should know why we are here right?”

Tiffa didn't back down despite seeing how displeased her father was and greeted him gracefully. She didn't change her calm and bold attitude, she wasn't the student council president for nothing. After experiencing the fight with a battalion level demon beast, her mental strength was exceptional among all past student council presidents.

“... It's related to the new machine model?”

“Not just that, it concerns the person behind the new model- their friend Ernesti Echevarria.”

Tiffa said before Joachim could continued, and got more and more agitated:

“In the behemoth incident back then, many of the students including me survived because of his efforts, but he was the only one who didn't return from the Duke's territory! I don't know what your plans are, father, but I won't allow harm to come to my benefactor!”

Chid and Ady stood besides Tiffa, opposing their father.

“Father, please give us a reasonable explanation.”

With no room for lies or escape, they forged ahead with the will to do battle.

“... That's the summary of what I gathered from my men.”

The commander of the red rabbit knights based in fort Casadesus, Molten Fredholm stood at attention as he read out the contents of the report. He was inside the top level war room in fort Casadesus. It was usually not in use, and would double as a conference room when high nobles visits the fort. There was a table in the center of the room surrounded by four chairs. Seated in one of them was the master of fort Casadesus, 'Knut Dixgard'.

After hearing Molten's report, Knut closed his eyes for a moment before expelling the heavy air in his lungs.

“Alright, I understand the capability of the new models. What did our knights think of it?”

Molten's report was the investigation report of the new models during the shaker worms attack.

“To be honest, I have to admit the combat performance is great. Even with double the number of Karrdators, we might not achieve similar results. Almost all the knights who fought alongside them wished to implement the new models.”

Knut frowned slightly and groaned as he leaned back on his chair. Below the carefully combed hair was a prominent hooked nose making his facial features look more powerful.

“... The new model is good for the nation. We can't leave it alone.”

Knut said softly and Molten nodded.

“Molten, the students who constructed the new model would like to apply for the development of the new technology-- They request for us to mediate any problems that might occur.”

Knut had a set of documents that was different from the earlier report. It was forwarded to him from Marquis Serrati after he received it from Laihiala pilot academy, a report and request letter.

“And they would like to join the NTR Lab.”

“Oh? Not just providing the technology?:

“I quote, ‘We are the one who understand the new models the most. If we can take part in the research related to this, we will definitely contribute to the technological advancement of Silhouette knights.’”

Knut read out a part of the request letter. Morton stroked his carefully groomed beard and laugh out loud.

“Hahaha! The students have been getting greedy recently, this means they have the confidence to develop the new model? Isn’t that great? Graduates from Laihiala are great talents, and they are the ones who made the new models. We welcome such capable young ones.”

Molten wasn’t just being polite. He predicted that the development and implementation of the new models would require a lot of talents, the more the merrier. It is a joy when both parties were after the same goal.

“But it is not certain how much of the credit belongs to them.”

But Knut was thinking about another matter. His gaze fell on a series of words on the report-- ‘Proposed by: Ernesti Echevarria’. The image of the silver haired boy flashed across his mind.

“Molten, interview the students about the new models.”

“Yes! What are your plans, my lord?”

“I, well... there is someone I have to meet personally.”

For Knut who was shouldering heavy responsibility within the nation, his words had a hint of bashfulness. Molten bowed and went about issuing orders.

Knut stared at the door Molten went out from and sighed softly. He received the report from Marquis Serrati, and knew the new model wasn’t developed by the students alone.

... Did I underestimate him back then? But....

Knut chased the regret welling in his heart away. This feeling was because of his carelessness back then, when the king promised to disclose the manufacturing method of ether reactors in exchange for ‘designing a Silhouette knight’.

For Knut, the problem was the playful attitude of the king. The person he made the promise with-- Eru was someone Knut had to look out for, but it wasn’t very much. That child had talent beyond his age, but no matter how brilliant he was, there was a limit. The king only stated the terms, but didn’t guarantee the provision of support.

Furthermore, Silhouette knight designing wasn’t something a mere student could handle. Fremmevira’s current Silhouette knight, the Karrdator was designed a hundred years ago. After accumulating long years of technological enhancement and mobilizing the best craftsmen of that era, they finally finished this masterpiece.

Karrdator predecessor 'Salodrea' was in service for almost two hundred years. Just from this numbers, it was clear how difficult it was to develop new machines. Knut experienced this himself, so he didn't even consider the possibility of that promise bearing fruit.

That's how it should be...

Less than a year after that incident, an unbelievable report reached his ears-- 'A student made a new Silhouette knight model.' Such a report was unheard of, and Knut almost fainted when he saw the name of the proposer. Ernesti Echevarria-- the promise Eru made with the king was starting to feel feasible, and Knut felt his common sense crumbling away.

When Knut was young, he had experience in an attempt to 'improve Karrdator'. The combat prowess of the Silhouette knights was linked to the stability and strength of the kingdom. As the master of the highest nobility Dixgard Dukedom, he wished for the advancement of the nation, and put this hope in the Silhouette knights.

With the permission of the king, he worked together with the NTR Lab, but the grand project didn't yield any satisfying results. The technology accumulated for the past century was a tough act to match, and the improvement was limited without any major breakthrough and didn't meet his expectation at all. With these unpleasant memories and experiences, he realized how hard it was to create a new Silhouette knight. Without years of accumulated technology, top notch experts or even funding, it's preposterous to imagine a bunch of students constructing a new model.

In that case-- Knut changed his thinking. The boy named Ernesti should have a certain 'something'. The 'something' from an unknown source that made an impossible task of developing new models possible. It would definitely bring much benefit to Knut and Fremmevira kingdom.

After thinking to this point, Knut finally realized how unreliable his judgement in the past was and felt a chill on his back. If Marquis Serrati hadn't grabbed hold of information about Eru and took action, Knut would only hear the report after the fact. He felt grateful to Marquis Serrati for the heads up, and used the chance to make his move. There was some unforeseen incident, but the new models displayed exceptional combat ability, and was highly evaluated by the knights. Knut was sure the nationwide implementation of the model was inevitable.

To achieve this, Knut needed to know what this boy Ernesti was scheming, and what were his plans. For Knut, Eru was a squirming shadow he didn't understand. Knut would definitely not hand over the future of his beloved country to such a person.

Knut who unconsciously closed his eyes in deep thought heard a gentle sound of knocking on the door. It was time to achieve his goal. He took a deep breath to calm himself, and invited the guest to enter the room.

Several figures walked along the corridors of fort Casadesus. Leading the way was a soldier in armor, who was followed by a rather short child. The light of the lantern flickered in the soldier's hands, casting shadows on the silent corridor. The clanking of the armor and the sound of footsteps created a soft melody.

At the end of the corridor, a sturdy door appeared in the faint light of the lantern. The carefully designed door had a different atmosphere from the surrounding. The door Labeled 'Top Level War Room' showed how special this room was. The soldier leading the way knocked and opened the door carefully, leading the boy, Ernesti into the room.

Eru went through the door and noticed the grand decoration of the room was vastly different from the rugged air of the fortress. As if to confirm the feel of the soft carpet unsuitable for iron boots, the soldier walked slowly to the middle of the room. There was a table there. A middle aged man-- master of the fortress Knut Dixgard was waiting there. He politely offered Eru a seat, and Eru deftly sat down after a

simple greeting.

The servant who appeared at the same time moved away after pouring a drink. The high class tea imported from the west tickled the noses of these two. Their conversation thus began harmoniously with a cup of red tea in hand.

To Knut, the conversation was a battle. He needed to judge Eru's character, motives, and then grab the initiative. The two of them should be gauging the distance carefully with each other on the surface while fighting intensely under the table.

But Knut was confused.

"... And so, the craftsmen from the pilot faculty developed the strand crystal tissue with tremendous effort, improving the power output of the new model by 1.5 times..."

Eru who was sitting opposite him was explaining nonstop. That was the case since Knut probed with a few question about the new model, turning into Eru's personal stage. And he prepared a lot of presentation materials as if he was planning for this.

"Please refer to the material here. As mentioned previously, The new model main advantage is in its greater power output and variety of equipment, but there is a minor issue in endurance..."

But Knut also wanted to learn more about the contents, so it was harder for him to handle. Even when Knut wanted to regain the initiative in the discussion, his ears were still listening to Eru's voice, his eyes stared at the documents and his mind was busy organizing the information about the new model. Even though a corner of his mind was sounding out in alarm, Knut continued to greedily absorb the information he desired.

"As for the cost involved, I can't give you a clear number at this stage. It might change with optimization of production in the future. But the expensive core parts of the Silhouette knight would remain the same, and the changes would mainly affect the cheaper parts, so we predict the price would not escalate too much..."

Eru's presentation carried on. Ever since he was summoned to fort Casadesus, Eru had been preparing the content of his presentation, and his explanation was near perfect. In the end, Eru kept talking for three hours. No matter how good one was, the drive to keep talking nonstop like this had to be his passion for robots.

In contrast to Eru who was sipping the cold red tea in satisfaction, Knut was busy tidying the contents in his mind, analyzing the mass production plan. When he wanted to ask some follow up questions, Knut finally remembered his original plan.

Knut was stunned, he didn't think he would be unable to use his negotiation skill which was honed in his duties as a Duke. Eru hit Knut's weak point, which was his strong interest in the new model. If that was Eru's plan all along, then Knut had completely lost. But that powerful card was temporarily ineffective because the explanation was over, now was the time to counterattack-- Knut also didn't understand why he was frustrated as he showed his ace in the hole.

"I understand now I have several questions about the new models... But Ernesti, before that, regarding what to do with these machines..."

Knut didn't take this seat for no reason. The air about him changed, it was like a sharp blade being unsheathed.

"I have permission from his majesty to take total control over the new model project."

The highest ranked Duke was tasked by the king himself, meaning he had the authority closest to the king. At least in regards to this case, his words was as good as the king's words.

“I will take charge of everything related to the new model, the information will be relayed to his majesty through me.”

This was Knut’s ace, and his last hand. ‘Taking total control of the opponent’ had a huge effect on the other party, and had the con of easily earning their ire.

For Knut who couldn’t make an enemy out of Eru, this wasn’t the best choice. But Knut felt it was dangerous to be led on like this. And he had only listened to Eru’s explanation and nothing more. Eru would definitely react strongly to this move, and that would be the best chance for Knut. The bigger the reaction, the easier it was for Knut to guide the flow of conversation, and he could make full use of his skills then.

Knut suppressed his messy thoughts and squinted slightly. But his opponent’s answer was not what he expected.

“That’s great, I won’t need to repeat this to his majesty again. If you have other questions, please don’t hesitate to ask.”

Eru nodded his head and bowed smoothly.

Knut succeeded in pressing down the groan which was some sort of miracle. The ace that was all powerful no matter who the opponent was didn’t have any effect and was dismissed. Knut didn’t expect Eru to act like he was saved the hassle. While he was dumbfounded, Eru gained control of the discussion again.

“If you have full authority over this sir, I would like to confirm something.”

“... Eh, what is it?”

“I remember requesting something for the students in the pilot faculty when I submitted the report...”

Hearing this, Knut coughed softly and regained his composure.

“Yes, I heard about that. I can’t guarantee they would be hired as the developers of the new models, but once we move officially into production phase, the more people we have, the better it would be. Or rather, I would push for them to take the job even if they don’t want to.”

Eru smiled and sighed softly. That was expected, he had accomplished most of his objectives anyway. But Knut still felt puzzled about Eru’s intention behind his words.

“I am here to explain the new models and to confirm the sempai would be employed.”

Eru answered frankly. Knut wondered why he thought something wasn’t right. He pondered for a while and found the reason.

“... What are your plans? Promoting the new model, marketing the students, there are no problem with this. But I haven’t heard the most important part, which is your plans, and you already seemed satisfied. You are the proposer of the new model right? Based on this merit, there should be something you would want to say.”

In the end, Knut still knew nothing about Eru, or heard any request made by Eru. Maybe it was due to fatigue, Knut didn’t beat around the bush and asked directly.

“Me? Nothing yet. I am still a middle school student, so I will stay in the academy until I graduate.”

Oh right, he was still a twelve year old child. Knut almost agreed with him, but realized quickly that wasn’t the issue here.

“Wha... You stirred this matter to this stage and still want to go back to school!?”

Knut forgot he was talking to a kid and was in chaos.

“That might be so... but let’s say I go to NTR Lab, I would be dropping out of school and making my parents sad.”

Eru didn’t abandon the logic of his previous life in some strange places, but bringing this up this late into the game made Knut ‘crumble’.

“... You, do you know what you did?”

“I only made some suggestions for a new Silhouette knight right?”

“Don’t make it sound so simple! You are acting like this is natural so it’s useless to explain, but I want to say it anyway! Listen, since the founding of this kingdom, no, in all the history of mankind, there has never been anyone who proposed a redesign of Silhouette knights alone!!”

Why did he have to explain this common sense? Knut felt an emptiness he had never experienced before in his life. If he didn’t have the experience of living as a noble for so long, he would have found someone to complain about this.

“And obviously, developing Silhouette knight is a grand project that involves many people! Even if there is a group who comes up with a new design for Silhouette knights, it was impossible to do so alone!!”

Knut was getting really agitated, he even frightened Eru a little.

“His majesty setting this term in exchange for the ether reactor... is as good as telling you it was impossible. but you did something so ridiculous like it was nothing, why are you acting like a kid after all that!!”

In reality, Eru was really just a child, so Knut was mistaken, but it’s a pity no one was present to retort him. When Knut thought a mere twelve year old ‘stirred up trouble’ and shook the entire nation, Knut’s mind snapped. He probably didn’t think about that because of his self defense mechanism. But Eru fanned the flame mercilessly.

“No, I don’t plan to present Tellestarle. I have something else for his majesty.”

“... There is more? What else do you want to make?”

The composure he had in the beginning was gone without a trace, veins appeared on Knut’s temples. Eru displayed his most brilliant smile of the day and said:

“Yes of course. Because making Silhouette knight is my ‘hobby’.”

The agitation just now seemed to be an illusion as Knut turned ominously silent. A similar scene flashed across his mind-- ‘because it’s my hobby’. It’s true, Knut finally understood that what Eru said to the king were the sincere words from his heart.

He then realized this person will definitely be a genius that will leave his mark in history and be unmatched in his field of choice. But at the same time, Eru was like a bad omen who would charge head on without regards to how much trouble it would cause others.

No wonder he hit it off with the king. The calm portion of his mind confirmed something ominous. The young Ambrosius was a capable and reckless genius, taking joy in setting up others. Back then, the Duke

had to go along with him and suffered much. Right now, Ambrosius was a 'wise king' -- wrong, his majesty still couldn't suppress his playful mentality-- but he was like a catastrophe back in the days. Knut didn't know, but the people in the palace called him the 'tamer'.

The boy before him was the same type of person as the king, he finally acknowledged this point. He didn't expect to uncover Eru's 'way of thinking' like this. He collapsed in his chair with a 'thump'.

"... I see."

The conversation ended with these heavy words. Molten mentioned after this incident that the two of them conversed for a long time, but Knut was obviously tired for some other reasons.

About a week after Eru and Knut's battle of words, the scene returned to Marquis Serrati's residence inside the imperial capital Känkänen.

"According to the information I got, they had this conversation."

Joachim Serrati reviewed the document he had already read several times. The summary of Eru and Knut's discussion was sent to him immediately after this. After he stoically finished his explanation, the children were speechless. They don't know where to place their raised fist and their mouths were tightly shut under an awkward expression. If one were to describe how they feel right now, it would be 'Ah, that's right, Eru is such a person.' Tiffa squeezed out the last ounce of her strong will to recover her composure.

"... Yes, that's right. Anyway... it's fine if he is happy."

She sounded a bit unhappy, but that was understandable. At this moment, the shaky Chid suddenly lifted his head. He understood Eru stirred up some trouble after hearing Joachim's explanation, but there was still an unsolved mystery.

"Then why is Eru not back?"

"I don't understand too. There are people who returned from fort Casadesus, did you ask them?"

"... Ah... We came here before asking..."

They were too agitated and forgot the boss and the others who were an important source of information. The three of them became dejected.

"Ara, to get so worked up, this boy Ernesti must be very precious to all of you.."

The three of them lost the imposing air they had when they entered the room. Joachim didn't lecture them and said calmly to the twins:

"Archid, Adeltrud, stay by his side in the future too."

"Yes, yes! Ah huh?"

The two of them thought they would be lectured, and was surprised after hearing that.

"Duke Dixgard thinks he would be safe for now, I feel the same way too. His actions in the future will affect the kingdom... No, it would have even wider consequences. He will have many comrades and lots of enemies too. No matter how capable he is, it would be hard to make it through the turmoils by himself. You are close to him and had been learning from him right? Continue to support him from now on too."

Chid and Ady listened with a surprised expression, and then clenched their fists tightly, saying firmly to their father:

“Of course!”

“That’s right! It’s obvious I will be together with Eru!”

The twins who steeled their resolve once again nodded and Tiffa hugged them from behind. Watching this scene, Joachim glanced at the part of the report he didn’t tell the children.

The Duke said he has the naivety of a child and the thinking mindset of an adult. It would be a good move to have playmates from childhood around him. I hope he doesn’t immerse himself in the pursuit of power, and continues to work hard for the country.

Joachim looked at his children with unexpectedly gentle eyes, but the children who were hugging did not notice.

“... Setting this aside for now.”

Joachim changed his tone, reverting back to his strong attitude. The three of them stiffened.

“The three of you skipped school and came here? Seems like we need to have a proper talk.”

The smiles on the children became bitter, it couldn’t be helped-- A huge lightning struck at the very end of the storm.

Duke Dixgard was troubled-- and the reason was standing before him, smiling with a huge pile of notes in his arms.

“You really... plan to make that?”

“Yes. I have confidence that this is worth teaching me the manufacturing method of ether reactor for.”

Eru’s cheerfully replied to the words Knut squeezed out. *Lucky I took a look before it was presented to the king--* Knut wanted to praise himself.

The document Eru showed to him had the Silhouette knight and the draft design that was planned to be shown to the king. This ‘thing’ that threw out all sorts of common sense could still be submitted to his majesty, but not directly like this. Knut sighed deeply and realized he needed to keep this ridiculous existence named Ernesti in check.

“Pardon my intrusion!!”

Knut’s thoughts were interrupted by a 3rd party. Without waiting for a reply, the commander of the red rabbit, Molten barged straight in.

Even a commander of the knight would be faulted if he interrupted the conversation of a Duke with his guest. But Knut could tell it was an emergency from the way Molten was.

“What happened?”

“Smoke signals from the direction of ‘Dallier Village’ had been spotted... the smoke is ‘red’, probably a group of demon beast above duel level.”

Demon beast above duel level, and an entire group, this meant 'death' for villages with limited defenses. Knut decided immediately--

"Molten, you had already ordered the pilots to sortie right? Sent at least a platoon, head at full speed for 'Dallier Village', we must protect the village!!"

"Yes my lord! We are making preparation. Once the team is formed, I will send the red rabbit knights to attack!!"

Molten bowed and charged out with the same speed of him charging in.

"There is no time to chat, I will command from the fort. You... I can't just leave you here, come along with me."

Eru nodded and exited the room, following behind Knut.

雙胞胎阿奇德和亞黛爾楚，
高興地用小小的拳頭輕觸老大粗壯的拳頭。
這幅畫面溫暖了維修班每個人的心靈。



Chapter 15- The things squirming in the darkness

Under the clear blue skies, two figures were dragging their feet as they walked through the Laihiala academy campus. It was the twins Chid and Ady. The two of them who were lectured along with their elder sister by their father were also warned by the teachers after returning to school. Battered all over, the two of them walked gloomily along the corridor of the campus renowned for its size.

They were out on a walk to change their mood, but they had a strong urge to give up on everything and just lie down on the ground. They were pushed forward by the need to 'check on Eru's situation'. Squeezing their last ounce of strength, the two made it to the pilot faculty's workshop, and rushed at the boss when they saw him.

"The silver boy? He should be educating the Duke... Cough cough, explaining to the Duke right now."

"... Eeeerrruuu..."

The boss looked at the exhausted twins who collapsed onto the floor with a mix of sympathy and pity. The two of them realized that if they had asked the boss from the start, they wouldn't have blown the matter up, so they were laughing dryly too.

"And so, the boy won't be back so soon. Ara, what a rare sight. The duke even cried..."

The boss said as he stroked his beard and the twins just muttered an acknowledgement on the ground. The boss didn't really mind and simply nodded. He then started explaining the things decided at Casadesus. The boss thought of the twins as people related to the development of the new model and felt the obligation to inform them accordingly.

"Just sit there, it's fine. The new model is under the charge of the Duke now. This means the development project would be directed by the Duke. Depending on their progress, the craftsmen here might be sent to the NTR Lab or some factory to manufacture the new model."

The tired Chid lifted his head in surprise.

"Are you going to leave, Boss?"

Chid couldn't conceal the loneliness in his voice. For Chid and Ady, the senpais in the pilot faculty weren't playmates like their friends in class, but comrades on the same team, an existence similar to older brothers. When the twins heard they were going to leave, it hurt them a little.

"I was going to graduate next year anyway, so don't show such an expression."

The Boss poked Chid's forehead, wanting to dismiss the gloomy air. But the power of a dwarf's fist was so powerful it made Chid fall over.

As Ady pulled away, the Boss cleared his throat and went back on topic.

"Ah-- there's one more thing. The reason why the boy has yet to return... is probably due to them squabbling over how to handle him."

"Handle... Eru?"

“Yup. The boy said he wanted to stay in the academy until graduation, but honestly speaking, the circumstances doesn’t allow this. We also did our best to develop the new model, but the ‘essence’ of the boy was different from us. It’s impossible for him to keep the status quo and continue schooling.”

The twins spent a bit of time understanding what the Boss said. They just heard the Boss was leaving, and adding in this dire news made the faces of the twins turn green.

“Eh... Nee nee, Boss, do you mean Eru will go to the NTR Lab too?”

“Eru... Will leave!?”

This was a possibility they had never considered. With the introduction of the new machines, there was no telling if they could become a knight. But they had always assumed that they would be together with Eru until they graduate. This wasn’t a one sided wish, the three of them were classmates with the same ambition after all. But there had been a drastic change to the situation, stopping this path they had always taken as a given. The shocking content made the twins hang their heads in silence. The boss wanted to call out to them, and at this moment--

Chid lifted his head, his body emitting a steely resolve.

“I have decided. I will find Eru immediately.”

Chid’s soft words stunned the Boss and Ady, who turned towards him.

“Damn it, how long do you think it would take? It’s not so simple that you can go if you want to! And the boy will be back sooner or later, there is no rush...”

“I don’t care! I want to find him now!! And ask him face to face!! I won’t allow him to stay there by himself!!”

Chid who was usually lazy became full of anger, showing the others his determination.

“Calm down, how are you getting to somewhere so far away?”

“Silhouette gear! With that, we could move faster than a horse!!”

Ady raised her fist as well, making the boss hold his head with a headache. He knew the twins were the pupils of Eru, so they could actually do it if they wanted to. But the trip to Casadesus was easier said than done. Domestic travel with the Kingdom of Fremmevira was paved with danger. Only those with experience and adequate preparation could survive the trip. No matter how good the twins were, they were definitely underestimating the dangers. The boss was doing all that he could to stop their recklessness.

But the one who stopped the agitated twins was a calm voice that came from behind.

“And of course, we won’t let you do that.”

Edgar grabbed the twins by their arms, restraining them.

“Edgar senpai!? Unhand me!”

“No. Both of you listen up, the journey to Casadesus is dangerous! Even with Silhouette gears and your skills, I won’t permit you to go. I understand... how you feel, but we can only wait for now.”

The twins were still calm enough to not draw their staff. Edgar was grabbing their arms, mere children wouldn't be able to break free without using physical boost. It became a tug of war match. Helvi and Dietrich who walked towards them from behind watched them with a troubled expression.

"... Oh right, Di, that thing isn't repaired yet right?"

An awkward atmosphere was hanging over the workshop because of the intense debate when this untimely words were uttered. Under the gaze of everyone present, the boss smiled mischievously, and gestured behind him with his chin. Everyone was baffled by the sudden change in topic, but they still looked in the direction indicated.

Before them, a machine that was being repaired seated on the Silhouette knight repair platform at the end of the room. It was customized with strand crystal tissue with the primary armor, the outer skin had not been installed yet. One man reacted strongly to the armor that was painted red.

"It's Guyale! I remember it was only half finished when you all set off for Casadesus. Ara, it is almost complete... Nee, Boss, isn't the construction of the new model under the purview of the Duke and had been stopped? What are you planning?"

Guyale's pilot Dietrich turned from joy to troubled, a face full of expression.

"Well, we won't be building new ones, but it would be a shame to stop those that were half done. So we will finished this one up."

Dietrich asked gleefully while the boss nodded his head while explaining. The others ignored the two who were chatting harmoniously and was puzzled.

"The new models are under the charge of the Duke, so we can't just leave this one here in Laihiala. We can't trouble the Duke over such a small matter, so we have to deliver it over, right?"

The smile on Dietrich's face froze while Edgar and Helvi who were starting to understand what the Boss was saying had a complicated expression.

"It's not safe for Guyale to travel alone, Edgar, bring your Earlecumber along. We will follow in carriages, so we can make repairs if needed on the way there. And we might have extra passengers on the way back."

Understanding what he was trying to say, Chid and Ady stared at the Boss with wide eyes. The face of the boss covered under his beard had a wide grin.

"Hey Boss, even if you want to help them, you shouldn't spoil them like this."

"Oh-? I am not doing this for them, it just so happen I have 'some business there'. But things might not go so smoothly."

Edgar who heard this couldn't help but shrug. The boss was definitely going out of his way for the twins. But Edgar could only hold back a wry smile.

"Hee- I didn't think you would be so nice to kids, Boss."

"Hmmp, those who have wielded hammer with me are my brothers, a Dwarf would never ignore a brother in trouble... The boy is their friend right? There's no better time to help them."

The Boss puffed his chest out righteously, and the others could only give a bitter smile. Edgar wanted to stop the twins, but he understood how it was to part with friends, and wanted to aid them too. These actions

were very 'intentional', but Edgar understood the importance of keeping up appearance and let go of the twins' hands.

The two children happily bumped their fist against the Boss. This scene warmed the hearts of the maintenance department who were watching them bicker. They rolled up their sleeves and started moving purposefully.

"The outer skin is about 80 percent complete! Just a bit more!"

"We can use the spare parts for the delicate areas. Get the crane over here, install this quickly!"

The warm atmosphere a second ago was gone. The workshop regained its vigor of fire and iron, operating as usual. With the noise of rollers as the background, it overlapped with the sound of crisp sound of metal being hammered. After their experience in recent days, the skills of the maintenance crew had grown even better. Under their skillful hands, the red Silhouette Knight became closer to completion.

"... Sob, are we taking Guyale away? It is finally repaired... Should I ask Casadesus to hire me directly?"

"Di, well... Cheer up."

In the hot and steamy workshop, Dietrich was the only one watching the red machine being finished in sadness.

The red rabbit knights saw the smoke signals and were dispatched to its source, Dallier village. The platoon comprised of nine Karrdator and one command Karrdialia. As the distance was relatively near, the Silhouette knights traveled at a faster pace than normal.

All villages in the kingdom of Fremmevira have walls that could repel demon beasts. But normally, villages won't be able to erect walls that surround itself completely. Instead, they would focus on the village center, building reinforced walls there and erecting a mini stronghold there with supplies to tide over the danger. When they were attacked by demon beast that couldn't be defeated by humans, the villagers would seek refuge there, raise the smoke signal and wait for the knights stationed nearby to help them.

The stronghold was small, but as the last line of defence for the lives of the villagers, it was built to be very sturdy. But the smoke signal was red this time, meaning duel level demon beast were attacking. Facing monsters that could match up against the strongest weapon of humanity, the Silhouette knights, the fortress couldn't hold up indefinitely. The knights suppressed their anxiety as they rushed to the Dallier village.

There were quite a number of duel level demon beast in the nation, so such attacks were common. But when the red rabbit knights reached Dallier village, the demon beast weren't just one or two-- there were more than a dozen duel level demon beast around the village, with numerous mid level beast congregating there. The entire village had been morphed into the playground of the demon beast.

The scene before them made the cavalry scouts shiver in disbelief. They could see armored bear, blunt dragon, flaming tiger and all sorts of demon beast. Each of these demon beasts lived in the area around here, but they all have their own territory and wouldn't act in concert. It was unfathomable for them to be gathered here like this. All of them were in an aggressive state, there were even some fighting among themselves.

The scouts advanced cautiously, and found something that shouldn't be happening. Reflected in their eyes were the ruins of the sturdy walls that was supposed to protect the villagers. An armored bear was sticking its head into the stronghold, savouring 'something'. The platoon leader piloting the Karrdialia issued his order without hesitation once he received the report from the scouts.

“All units, charge into the village center at full speed. Wedge shaped formation, take down all the demon beasts in our way. Protect the stronghold at all cost!!”

Charging into the center of the demon beast encirclement was suicidal, but there was no voice of opposition coming from the pilots and they acknowledged firmly instead. The platoon adopted the wedge formation with amazing speed, kept their shields and equipped their Silhouette arms and swords. They were prioritizing their offence over their defence. With the command from the platoon commander, the group began their assault.

The sprinting giants were as loud as thunder, drawing the attention of the demon beasts. The Karrdators' Silhouette arms 'Culverin' glowed brightly from the charging Overed spell and blasted at the demon beasts mercilessly. The Karrdators seemed to be chasing their own magic shots as they ran, forging the shortest path to the center of the village with brute force.

Although the demon beasts had the advantage of numbers, they were scattered all over the place. The platoon repelled the demon beast with their tight formation, making it to the stronghold in one push.

The sounds of explosions finally grabbed the attention of the armored bear that was sticking its head into the stronghold. Lifting its head slowly, the bear growled unhappily for being disturbed in the middle of its meal and turned its head back-- and lost its chance to put up a fight. A roar of thunder came at it as the entire platoon fired a barrage from their culverin, before rushing at it en masse.

“Die! Bastard!!”

The vanguard of the wedge formation did not slow down, moving forth with the momentum of the Karrdialia and struck with its spear.

Although the armored bear had hardened skin, it couldn't guard against the rampage of the Karrdialia. The strike hit the armored bear in the head, piercing the skin and smashing the insides, killing the armored bear instantly. The Karrdialia did not slow down and crashed into the carcass of the armored bear.

In order to protect the platoon commander who took care of the demon beast splendidly, the other Karrdators changed their formation immediately, arranging themselves in a semi circle outside the hole. They had an aura which screamed 'You shall not pass!'. The other demon beast became more ferocious when they smelled the scent of the armored bear's blood, and swarmed up in a frenzy. Facing the tsunami coming at them, the Karrdators stood their ground.



The first wave of attacks had reduced the demon beasts' numbers so that they were about on par with the platoon, but the reckless charge into the midst of the demon beast group left them in a crisis. The assault earlier depleted most of the mana pool, limiting their means of attack. Mana was being created as the ether reactor groaned with the intake of air, but it couldn't keep up with the depletion rate the machines were using to evade the demon beasts' vicious attacks.

Blocking the fire of the flaming tigers with shields, dodging the tail whips of the blunt dragons, taking on the charge of the armored bears. Utilizing the intelligence of humans which the demon beasts lacked, the Silhouette knight overcame the crisis with teamwork and skills, but were constantly in danger, just like walking on a tight wire.

"We will never retreat! Exterminate them right here!!"

Breaking the stalemate was the platoon commander. The high performance command Karrdialia was damaged in the assault of the armored bear, but it still took out the demon beast that engaged him. Before the mana of the machine was completely exhausted, it delivered a last burst of attack.

The battle ended shortly after that. The knights who gained the advantage in numbers charged into the enemy formation and achieved victory. After taking down the last duel level demon beast, the midsized demon beast were all repelled.

All machines in the platoon were damaged. Three of them were half destroyed, another two were total losses. It was a close victory, but they completed their mission.

After the long battle ended and the area secured, it was already dark. The support units standing by outside entered and provide relief to the survivors. Bon fires were set up around the stronghold and tents were erected to tend to the wounded. It was a disaster within the stronghold, the armored bear that broke through the walls killed half the population of Dallier village.

The surviving villagers expressed their thanks to the knights for making it in the nick of time. There were some who thought 'if only the knights came earlier' or 'I will mourn for the neighbor who passed on'. But the most important thing was that they were still alive. Everyone congratulated each other for living on. This was the unique thought process of citizens who lived alongside 'demon beasts'. Their cold and extremely positive attitude became the motivating force supporting them in this harsh environment.

Apart from the loss of lives, the damage to the buildings were great too. The knights weren't just tasked with driving the demon beasts out. In situations like this when the demon beast caused large scale damages, the knights would be stationed there temporarily, ensuring the safety of the area and assisting with restoration works. Only in emergencies such as this will the Silhouette knight be used as extremely strong construction machines. It won't be used in this way normally because the cost would outweigh the benefits. The scene of 10 meter tall Karrdator repairing the houses would carry on for quite some time.

As the repairs of the village began officially, two Karrdator capable of walking by themselves were dispatched to fort Casadesus to report the safety of the village and the start of restoration works. They will need to request reinforcement from the fort to retrieve the badly damaged machines.

The pilots only did basic repairs to the machine and returned to base, consoling the partner whose machine short circuits every now and then. The journey was uneventful, and they reached the forest near fort Casadesus in no time. They will reach the fort after passing through the woods. Bearing news of victory, they advanced along the forest path while chatting casually.

While the platoon of red rabbit knights were subjugating the demon beasts in Dallier village, a shadow that wasn't the knight's support units was observing from the forest. The figure was covered with a cloth that blended into the forest, hard to detect like a shadow.

The shadow left the place after most of the duel level demon beast had fallen, jumping onto a horse that was tied to a tree in the vicinity. The horse walked slowly and silently through the forest for a while before a cabin came into view.

The cabin was originally the rest station for hunters working in the forest. It could be used as a refuge if they were chased by demon beast. Made from sturdy logs, the cabin was small but durable. The shadow dismounted and rapped the door in a certain rhythm. After the sound of unlocking was heard, the door was opened.

The cabin was unexpectedly crowded. Everyone was wearing dark coloured leather armor and seated around the table in the middle, discussing something. On the table was a map that detailed the terrain in the surroundings, with arrows and legends marked on it. The person that entered the cabin slowly unraveled the cloth around his body-- it was the man who got the information about the new model from the student in Laihiala academy city.

“Captain, as expected, the red rabbit knights defeated the demon beasts.”

“I figured that that would happen, those knights exist for this very reason. How large was the dispatched forces?”

“About a platoon size.”

The woman that was addressed by the man as captain crossed her arms after hearing the report. She pointed out her sources that told her there were roughly 3 platoons deployed in the fort, so there should be two platoons left in Casadesus plus the new models.

“Alright, withdraw the scouts. We will proceed as planned-- the job we have all been waiting for.”

After saying that, the woman looked out of the window. There were figures that looked like the mythical giants in fairy tales, covered in canvas, vines and plants. The giants completely occupied the vast space around the cabin. The objects that were camouflaged by the items placed on them were silent, eagerly awaiting the moment when they would be activated.

In the workshop of Laihiala academy’s pilot faculty, the craftsmen were wielding their hammers as usual. The noise of the rollers could be heard overhead and a roar which could be heard over all the din announced the conclusion of the final checks.

A Silhouette knight was seated on the giant chair-like repair platform.

The chest armor was opened, allowing easy access to the pilot cockpit. The craftsmen who were repairing the machine moved away as a student walked passed them towards the machine. Pilots-- those with the skills to maneuver Silhouette knights and possessed the training of a knight, the cadet of the pilot faculty. He boarded the machine and unlocked the control stick by his legs and pulled hard. The sound of gears clicking into place and the compression of air overlapped, closing the chest armor of the machine slowly.

“It’s been a long time. Tellestarle wasn’t bad, but I feel more at ease in here.”

Dietrich leaned back in the cockpit of his repaired machine ‘Guyale’, and was moved. With 90% damaged-- a never seen before number, the Silhouette knight was reforged with the effort of the craftsmen. Almost everything in the cockpit was replaced, the smell of new leather tickled Dietrich nose.

“You had just been reborned, but I have to send you away. Ughh...”

He had a face that 'looked good when he kept his mouth shut' which showed a bitter expression. Dietrich pushed the control stick lightly, it was the only thing that was salvaged from the destroyed cockpit. The wear and tear and familiarity troubled him. Even though it was contrary to the wishes of the boss and the twins, it was still decided that the new models would be under the Duke's management now. He smiled wryly and shook his head, pushing his troubles behind him and opened the cap of the sound amplifier.

"Guyale is standing up, please clear the area."

Dietrich stepped on the pedal and operated the control sticks, and Guyale with his new outer skin followed the instruction of its master faithfully. The ether reactor came to life, the sound of the air intake revving noisily. The magius engine applied the mana from the reactor onto the scripts and the crystal tissue flexed accordingly, making the sound of tensing and moved the giant knight. The armored knight trembled and after the gap of several months, the 'crimson knight' rose once again with heavy steps.

Guyale stepped out from the edge of the workshop. Its shattered armor reforged with no sign of the damage it had, reflecting the bright red glint under the sun. Because it was customized in the same way as the Tellestarle when it was repaired, the interior was totally new, even though it looked about the same on the outside. Back weapon had been installed on it with the Silhouette arms 'Kamast'. Learning from its lesson of its weapons breaking, there were four swords equipped on its waist, with two of them being reserves, it was heavily armed.

Guyale was a machine which focused on offense with dual blades. It might not have a shield, but the armor from its shoulder to the arms were reinforced to make up for its lack of defences. Standing beside the standard model Earlecumber, Guyale looked rather bulky.

"Alright, no problems from my side. Are the preparations ready?"

Earlecumber which was standing in front of the workshop raised a hand to acknowledge Dietrich. Aside from Earlecumber, there were two carriages and other familiar faces.

"David, isn't this Silhouette knight a property of the academy? Handing it over like this troubles me."

"It's just for a moment, so its fine. And it had already been agreed that the Duke-sama would exchange each machine with a Karrdator. The number of machines in the campus would be the same."

"That's not the issue... Well, forget it. The pilot faculty had been breaking the tradition all year long, it's too late to bring this up..."

Dean Lauri who had been more opened minded recently mumbled and waved his hand casually. Batson who was on a carriage said in a soft voice:

"Loading of the goods is completed... Isn't this pushing it a bit too much? But it won't fit if I don't do this."

Including the ones used by Chid and Ady, three Silhouette gears-- Motor beats were secured with steel wire. Even though they were smaller than Silhouette knights, not much space was left after squeezing in these large armors. Just three of them took up an entire carriage.

"Three? We are bringing Eru's machine along?"

"If we only bring ours, he will definitely throw a tantrum..."

Chid and Ady nodded at each other. The boss completed loading the other carriage and called out.

"Alright, let's make a trip to Casadesus. Move out!"

“Understood--! See you Batson! We will bring Eru back!”

“Yeah-- it’s a rare chance, so lecture him in my place--”

The carriage set off quietly under the watchful eyes of everyone. The boss, several maintenance staff and the twins sat in the carriages with the red and white Silhouette Knights following behind. Batson who was left behind waved his hands for a while. Lauri changed his mood, turning his head back and said:

“We need to prepare for the Karrdator that will be coming. We might need the help of your juniors, so plan with that possibility in mind.”

The group acknowledged sparsely, and the craftsmen who were left returned to the workshop. Many things might have changed, but they were living their usual lives.

This happened about a week ago--

A man walked on the streets of Laihiala city, walking ahead without reservation towards a non descript house. The people inside the house were surprised by the visit, even the tall woman sitting at the very end was surprised. But she composed herself in no time and smiled mockingly, squinting her eyes with a hint of a threat and said:

“Ara, I wasn’t expecting the envoy from the ‘home country’ to visit, this is a surprise.”

The ‘envoy’ wasn’t fazed, standing tall before the woman and spoke in a businesslike manner.

“... ‘Kerhild Hietakangas’, ‘his majesty’ has orders for you and your ‘copper fang knights’.”

“Ara, his majesty is so kind to address us as knights.”

Ignoring Kerhild’s teasing, the envoy conveyed the purpose of his visit plainly.

“His majesty is very curious about your report of the ‘toy’, and would like one to be sent to him. They are too extravagant for mere ‘demon beast guards’, only our ‘home nation’ is worthy enough to have it. Obtain them by all means possible and present it to his majesty.”

The orders were within her expectation, so Kerhild simply shrugged.

“We were just complaining about the mission being too boring, this came at the right time.. That’s what I wanted to say, but that ‘toy’ is in some place called a fort after all. And it is a bit too big to steal, you understand?”

“I get it, but like I said, ‘by any means’. His majesty knew about this... so you can use ‘everything you have’.”

A smile that came from the bottom of her heart surfaced on Kerhild’s face for the first time. To supplement the description of her smile, it was like ‘a predator who got its prey alive’.

“Hee... if everything is at my disposal, that includes the treasured ‘Wendebadalla’?”

“Of course, even ‘cursed bait’ is fine too.”

The answer that went beyond Kerhild’s imagination made her open her eyes wide before bursting into laughter.

“Haha! This is interesting! Ara, the miser majesty is being generous this time! He must really like this toy.”

From the depths of the narrow eyes of the envoy, strong determination could be seen, but Kerhild didn't mind at all. She didn't care about others when she talked or acted.

“Sigh, guess we have to do this... The men are prepared. Help me convey to the ‘dear majesty’, I will definitely deliver what he wants.”

“... Very good. Those demon beast guards should be very pleased with themselves right now and let their guard down, so act with haste.”

After this, the envoy turned and left after completing his job. Kerhild who watched the envoy leave couldn't help smiling as she said to the others.”

“How cold, just like usual. Never mind, men! After being chased to this hell hole of a country, we are finally in luck!”

“That's right, it's our win if we complete this mission!”

The men around her were all in high spirits. The smile on Kerhild's face darkens.

“Alright, let's bring the ‘toy’ the demon beast guards are so proud of as a gift.”

And so, the ‘copper fang knights’ began their operation in this country silently.

One week later, ‘Acquart forest’ near fort Casadesus.

In the dense Acquart forest, it was dim even in the middle of the day and the air was heavy and still. The path through the forest was illuminated by sunlight, making the surroundings brighter. But outside the range of the sunlight, a group of people were squirming in the depths of the vegetation. They were wearing dark coloured armor that didn't draw much attention, pruned down and keeping still, waiting for the right moment. Aside from the occasional chirping of the birds, it was absolutely quiet.

After an unknown period had passed, a shadow meandered through the forest. Wearing dark colored armor similar to his comrades, he reported.

“Captain, message from ‘reindeer’: ‘The hunter had put down the prey’.”

After hearing the quiet report from her subordinate, the copper fang knight commander Kerhild Hietakangas instructed softly:

“Alright boys, are you ready? Activate ‘Wendebadalla’.”

The subordinate nodded and disappeared into the depths of the forest without much noise.

This group was known as the copper fang knights, but normal ‘knights’ won't be able to conceal themselves and hide in the darkness to execute their plans. Calling them a ‘band of knights’ was almost a mockery-- they were an existence known as ‘spies’. For them to act in a group, it meant their goal wasn't simple.

The birds resting on the trees became agitated, chirped and flew away. At the same time, A giant object that was camouflaged behind them was preparing to stand up slowly. That object which was about 5 times the size of a human showed its true form. It was a humanoid machine made from steel and crystal tissue-- Silhouette knights.

The Silhouette knight known as 'Wendebadalla' to Kerhild and the others had many strange features: A smooth exterior, partial armor, visible demon beast leather, two holes on its oval head for vision, with its lifeless eye crystal swaying inside. The skinny appearance felt unpleasant.

Most incredible of all, 'Wendebadalla' did not make any churning noise unique to Silhouette knights. The sound of the air intake was soft and vague, blending into the noise of the forest.

Somehow, the crystal tissue that should be emitting shrill string like instrument noises were almost silent, and its footfall was nonexistent compared to other machines.

The faceless giant with a thin presence was like a spirit in the dim forest. Kerhild watched its blurry figure and smiled deviously.

"You are the trump card we worked so hard to smuggle in, so show us what you are made of. Okay, get ready for battle. There is only one chance, so don't screw this up. Give it your best shot!"

She waved her hand and the three Wendebadalla started advancing in silence. The squirming spirits headed towards the main road of the forest, where the two Karrdators would definitely pass through. They were waiting for the red rabbit knights who were bringing news from Dallier village.

When the spirits detected the knights, they went forth like a shadow, approaching from behind quietly.

The pilots of the Karrdator weren't careless. It might have looked like they were strolling casually, but they were watching their surrounding carefully, looking for demon beast that might pop out. But their focus were on the sound. The more threatening the demon beast, the bigger the disturbance, so they had been trained to ignore the unnatural sound emitted from their machine. That was why the knights didn't notice the spirits sneaking up on them, concealed by the noise of their machine churning.

Sneaking behind the Karrdator without a sound, the Wendebadalla closed in speedily. In their hands were a thrusting weapon stiletto. Sacrificing combat prowess for speed and stealth, the Wendebadalla had below average power, light armor and lacked endurance. In a straight up fight, it would take three Wendebadalla to match up against one Karrdator. It's a pure assassin type.

The stiletto was aimed at the flank of the machine. The arm joint of the Silhouette knight was thin, it was at best covered by chain armor or demon beast leather. In order to draw in air into the reactor, intake valves were usually situated above the abdomen, and the chest cavity had the most fragile part of the Silhouette knight -- the pilot. That was the biggest weak point of the Silhouette knight.

The Wendebadallas hugged the Karrdators from behind, stabbing the blade into the flank. The weapon specialized for thrusting attacks pierced the thin armor easily, hitting the pilot inside. Before the pilot of the Karrdator could react, the blade of the giant took his live. The Karrdator didn't move, stopping like a puppet that lost its strings. A Silhouette knight that lost its pilot won't go out of control like living beings. Seeing both Karrdator stop, Kerhild laughed softly.

"Alright, things are progressing smoothly. Let's make the next move, get ready!"

After the Wendebadalla slowly lay the Karrdator onto the ground, the soldiers came out from the woods. The Stiletto could take out the pilot in one hit in most cases, and had the advantage of damaging just the armor, intake valve and the pilots. This meant it wouldn't affect the operation of the Silhouette knight much. If someone else controlled it, the Karrdator could be moved once again.

They 'cleaned up' the pilots of the Karrdator, and sat into the bloody cockpit without hesitation. And so, the Karrdator became real spirits and slowly stood up. The ironic thing was the Karrdator which was easy to control benefitted the assassin. The Karrdator which fell into enemy hands as though nothing had happened

walked forth steadily, while the Wendebadalla blended into the darkness of the woods once again. The spirits marched step by step towards fort Casadesus.

古耶爾 Guyale

Main Pilot / Dietrich Cunitz

spec

Height / 10.4m

Weight / 18.7t

Equipment / Swords x 4

Magic Armament 'Wind Blade'



explanation

Training Silhouette Knight from Laihiala Pilot Academy. The students customized this outdated model. It wield two swords, an offensive style that doesn't utilize a shield, but the limitation of the old model was its mediocre power output, a grave weak point. Hence, it was hard to fully utilize its strengths. It was completely destroyed after the Behemoth incident, and was redesigned when it was repaired. It overcame the issue of power output, morphing into a machine with great potential.

Chapter 16 - The fire of fort Casadesus

The warm sun set behind mount Aubigne and the scenery was enveloped in darkness with the chill of the autumn breeze. The wind made the guards on duty at fort Casadesus shiver. His companions who had left to light up the torches everywhere had returned to the observation post.

“Sigh, guard duties are going to get even more tiring in the coming season.”

“You are right, I want to change shift and rest soon...”

The two talking with each other heard the heavy footfalls of a large presence approaching and looked tense. They observed the situation on the road from above the city gate. In the dim light before the city fell completely into darkness, they identified the giant knight wearing green armor.

“Oh, that’s a Karrdator? The platoon sent to Dallier village?”

“Hold on, let me confirm... Yes, that’s our crest.”

Seeing the crest of the red rabbit knights on the shoulders of the approaching Karrdator, a weird noise could be heard. It might be some damaged parts jamming, the Karrdator made clanking sounds every time it moved. The damage seemed rather severe. The guards saluted them and asked:

“Thank you for your hard work. How’s the situation at Dallier village?”

“The village is badly damaged, but we took care of the demon beasts.”

The pilot in the Karrdator said that they were piloting the badly damaged machine in the Dallier village expedition, and were sent back to bring news of their victory. Acknowledging the report, the guards opened the gates. The Karrdator on duty manipulated the control of the gate, and the entrance to the fort opened slowly with the grind of wood against wood.

The two returning Karrdator and the carriage following behind entered, showered by the praise and greetings of the guards. If you come home victorious, even wounds would be a glorious medal. No wonder the guards were so excited.

“The damage are terrible, park the machine in the workshop before reporting in.”

“Okay... I was planning to do that.”

After saluting stiffly at the Karrdator stationed at the gate, the two damaged Karrdator moved slowly towards the workshop. There was a carriage following behind, but the guards assumed it was just carrying supplies, so no one paid it any heed.

Seeing the damaged machines enter the workshop, the craftsmen working on the other machines gathered in a hurry. As a precaution, the other machines had already been inspected, ready to be deployed. The knights received orders to stand by too and were gathered at the guard room near the workshop.

The leading craftsmen barked out orders when he saw the Karrdator making weird noises and moving stiffly, and the maintenance team brought in spare parts in a hurry. The two Karrdator walked slowly towards the repair platform where the other machines were placed. That was normal, but the carriage following into the workshop too, was puzzling. All the pilots were in the guard room, were the craftsmen accompanying the

platoon inside. But with the operation still going on, they wouldn't send people back needlessly. When a craftsman thought about that and was about to question about the carriage, something flew out from it.

Several arrows flew through the air with a dull sound, hitting the craftsman right in the chest. As he fell to the ground puking blood, a few armed members burst out of the carriage at the same time. At the same time, the Karrdator walking towards the repair platform revealed their true colors, pulling out their swords swiftly, their stiff actions moments ago was a ruse. They swung their blades at the entrance to the workshop, shattering the structure and blocking the way with debris. Cutting off reinforcements, the intruders fired their crossbows and wielded their swords, disposing of the remaining repair personnel in the workshop. The last person to dismount from the carriage was the captain of the copper fang knights-- Kerhild.

"You lot guard the front! How long do you need to deal with mere craftsmen!? Hurry up and steal that thing!"

The copper fang knights occupied the workshop in a blink of an eye, blocking the entrance to the workshop with the stolen Karrdator as they searched the workshop. Moments later, a member shouted for Kerhild's attention. Looking over, Kerhild saw a plain colored machine that was different from the Karrdator. Seeing the new model that looked out of place, Kerhild was confident the plan was going to work.

"Yeah, that's it... Just as I thought. Alright boys, prepare to pack it up...!"

The copper fangs knight were just spies after all. Individual combat prowess aside, there weren't many skilled pilots among them. Due to the necessity of the raid, everyone gathered here had piloting skills. As Kerhild activated the target 'toy', the others boarded the Karrdator on scene. They could only take three Karrdator, the rest of the Karrdator couldn't be activated.

"The extras might get in the way, get rid of them. The guards are coming soon, no time to drag on, move!"

Following her instructions, the Karrdator cut down the other machines seated on the repair platform. The unmanned machines were easily destroyed and reduced to scraps.

The red rabbit knights noticed something was wrong in the workshop. The Karrdator in charge of manning the gates rushed to the workshop because of the commotion, and was pounced on by another Karrdator.

"Damn it! What are these guys doing? They are stealing our Karrdator!!"

The red rabbit knights couldn't get hold of the situation, they only knew the intruders had captured some of the Karrdators and occupied the workshop.

Even though they lacked information, they still retaliated ferociously. That was natural, as the enemy stole their Karrdator and messed up their home base, how could they stay calm? They forgot about their confusion and attacked fiercely. But the high spirited red rabbit knights fell into panic once again when they saw the familiar machine behind the Karrdator.

"That... could it be...!!"

Their appearance weren't standardize, a sign of a rushed job. The back weapons that the other machines had gave off an intimidating aura. The new prototype Silhouette knight 'Tellestarle' advanced with strong steps threatening to smash the floor of the workshop. All five machines sent by Laihiala pilot academy had fallen into the hands of the copper fang knights.

"What power... it's more amazing than they say, like an untamed horse!"

A weird sensation came from the control stick, making Kerhild who was piloting one of the Karrdator curse. They knew the basics of the Tellestarle from the documents they obtained in advance, but it was

unbelievably hard to actually pilot it. Even experienced veterans would need some time to get used to this uniqueness.

“Who said these are second rate products made by students? Making me waste so much effort... Oh, so this is the back weapon.”

She followed the ‘instruction she learned beforehand’ to manipulate the unfamiliar control stick, and the Tellestarle faithfully moved in accordance to the pilot’s command. The auxiliary arms started moving, placing the Silhouette arms onto its shoulders. Kerhild felt a slight tremor from the pilot seat, squeezing the trigger after the weapons had been deployed.

She didn’t even aim seriously, and the magic shot fired straight ahead into the red rabbit knights’ formation. Explosion from the Overed spell spread further chaos, a signal of the coming nightmare.

Knut Dixgard who was inside the commander office of the fort stared at the ceiling unhappily as he listen to the explosion from the distance and the tremor in the room. He turned his gaze towards the member of the red rabbits who had came to report.

“Well then, how many intruders are there?”

“Sir! They had two Silhouette knights and ten soldiers on foot in the beginning. They have taken over the workshop, and stolen several of our Karrdator.”

Knut might look calm before his subordinate, but he was actually fuming inside. The intruders targeted the Silhouette knights of the red rabbit knights. No, since they were occupying the workshop, that must be their plan all along. Knut might be furious, but he had to admit that this was an efficient method to attack the fort.

At the same time, Knut was baffled by the objectives of the invaders. They didn’t seem to be much to gain from destroying the fort and stealing the Silhouette knights. In this nation that was infested with demon beasts, almost no one would benefit from the fall of a fort and its knights. It was the same with the Silhouette knights. The strongest weapon of humanity had the power of over a hundred men, but was costly to maintain with expendable parts. The ones who could ‘benefit’ would be the nobles who used them to protect the citizens and the merchants escorting their cargo. Both would benefit from proper channels, so there was no need to risk such an attack.

“Commander Molten is engaging with ‘Hymerwort’!”

The report from a knight rushing in pulled Knut out of his thoughts and lift his head. The commander of the red rabbit knights Molten was joining the fray.

With him and Hymerwort, the knights might wrest back the initiative.

“... I’m counting on you, Molten.”

Knut who saw a ray of hope mumbled softly as if in prayer. The next second, an exceptionally loud boom and tremor reverberated within the fort. Knut eyes darkened, the battle seemed to be getting more intense.

The overed spell fired by the Silhouette arms blazed through the air, hitting the ground before the red rabbit knight’s Karrdator. With the explosion of the spell, a large dust cloud was kicked up. The Karrdator who were fighting intensely with the enemy put up their shields and retreated in defence. The Tellestarles which were firing their back weapons moved stiffly, moving cautiously towards the courtyard of the fort.

The red rabbit knights opposing them felt a moment of unease. The tables had turned, the red rabbits knights had six Karrdator; one machine on the intruder’s side was done, so there were four Karrdator and five Tellestarle, so they had the advantage in numbers. And the power of the Tellestarle was clear for all to see.

The red rabbit knights knew about the stellar performance of the Tellestarles in the fight against the shaker worms, but they had never piloted it before and couldn't judge the situation clearly, leaving them overly guarded.

The red rabbit knights hesitated on taking the offensive and the short stalemate made the copper fang knight feel as if they were walking on thin ice. Kerhild couldn't help complaining.

"Isn't the ease of control the strong point of the machines in this country!? Really, it's hard to fight like this, the wise choice would be to run..."

"The performance of the new models are better. We are lucky the equipment are in good shape."

Seeing her members moving the back weapon, Kerhild frowned.

"Only that thing is useful. Let's charge out while the enemies are still on their toes. Get ready."

The red rabbit knights seemed to be hesitating because of their numbers, so this was a good chance. Even though Kerhild's gang had more machines, they didn't want to battle in machines that were so hard to handle. They used force to rob the machines, even with all five machines in hand, it was better for the damage to be minimal.

Their plan was to retreat after getting the new models, so they had prepared a trap in advance. But they needed to get away from the fort before activating it.

Because of the difficulty in piloting the new model, the plan to break through with numbers had changed. But the advantage in numbers remained. They prepared to breakthrough before the red rabbit knights realized the difficulties they faced.

"Karrdators to the front! The new models support from behind!"

This became the mission of the Karrdator which were good in melee combat and were not a target. There were only four, but that was enough to handle the current situation. With the support of the spell shots from the Tellestarle, the courtyard of fort Casadesus was gradually turning into rubble. The Karrdators of the intruders advanced using this opportunity. The red rabbit knights who were on the defensive kept blocking with their shields as they fell back.

"Knights! Let me through!"

Suddenly, a feral roar came from behind the red rabbit knights who were in a dire position. The knights formation split to the side on reflex, and a Silhouette knight went in with powerful momentum.

That Silhouette knight raised its warhammer high and swung it down mightily, hitting a charging enemy Karrdator like a magnet drawn to steel. The inertia of the hammer was converted to a shockwave, bending the Karrdator into a 'C' shape, shattering its armor and downing it. The impact didn't just pulverize the abdomen armor and crystal tissue, it even crushed the inner skeleton. The furious blow broke the morale of the intruders, and the Silhouette knight who showed up taunted them after the blow.

"Look at the mess you made, thieves! Don't think you can get away with this!!"

The machine spanned the hammer and lifted it again. It wasn't a Karrdator. The smooth and delicate outer skin was painted red, a majesty external armor was draped over its body. It was the personal Silhouette knight of the red rabbits commander Hymerwort. The machine had its own hanger bay and wasn't harmed by the intruders.

"How imposturous to do as you please, I have to put you in your place. Don't hold back, slaughter them!!"

Inside the cockpit, the red rabbit commander Molten Fredholm, pilot of Hymerwort was roaring like a bear in a bad mood due to hunger. The chaotic red rabbits regained their composure and formed up on either side of Hymerwort. The strongest knight in the band, Hymerwort, steadied the heart of the troops.

“Knights, advance! Take down these dirty rats!!”

Molten raised his hammer like a ceremonial staff. With his strong encouragement, the red rabbits took the offensive. The intruders still had the advantage in numbers, but the morale and teamwork of the red rabbits knight was not to be taken lightly.

Hymerwort overtook the advancing Karrdator and led the charge. The Tellestarles sent a few spells their way, but were deflected by the external armor. The flashy armor was damaged, but the main body was fine, charging on ahead. Hymerwort did not have any shields, but it was a heavy machine one size larger than Karrdators, the firepower from the Tellestarle won't be able to break through its armor so easily.

Hymerwort braved through the hail of fire and swung its hammer when it reached the enemy, making a sound akin to an explosion. After witnessing what happened to the Karrdator opposing it, the enemy Karrdator scattered away.

“Good, get out of my way, small fries!!”

This was exactly what Molten wanted. Hymerwort pulled back his hammer and lifted it overhead and continued forging ahead. Molten was after the Tellestarle situated at the back. The new models might be valuable, but it must not fall into enemy hands. Since the enemy was not resisting, Molten intended to charge over and destroy them.

The hammer howled towards the Tellestarle piloted by Kerhild. Cursing the machine that was not moving as she wished, Kerhild managed to evade the giant hammer. But Molten pulled back his hammer with a spin and followed up with an attack. Living up to his title of knight commander, Molten's displayed his skills and attacked continuously with his hammer. Used in conjunction with his heavy armor and powerful machine, it could smash the intruders into pieces.

“Ugh... This one is the command Silhouette knight? It's amazingly strong!!”

Kerhild was gradually getting used to the machine in the short time she controlled it. But before she could master the controls, the merciless consecutive attack forced her into a corner. As the hammer was about to deliver a devastating blow--

“Captain!!”

Before the hammer could accelerate, another Tellestarle got in the way with its shield. The movement was rugged, just an assault with brute force. But it managed to stop the hammer that had accelerated halfway, leaving just a muffled sound.

“Annoying!!”

The heavy machine Hymerwort pushed at the shield of the Tellestarle with its powerful strength. Even though it was similar in size to Karrdators, the power of the strand crystal tissue could match the heavy machine, standing up to Hymerwort. Seeing the Tellestarle wrestling on par with his unit, the surprised Molten twisted the lips under his moustache.

“Hmm, so this is the power of the new model, to think it could match my Hymerwort. Although I want it to be part of my knights, it is a hindrance right now!!”

The new model that fell into the hands of the opponents were troubling. With the size of a Karrdator and as powerful as the Hymerwort, it was like a bad joke. At this moment, the other Karrdators charged into the formation of the defenders, turning this into a chaotic battle. This move lowered the spirits of the red rabbits, forcing the fight into a stalemate again.

“Captain, now’s our chance!!”

Kerhild nodded at her subordinate. She understood this was the best opportunity to escape the fort. Hymerwort was too dangerous. They could stand up to it in terms of power output, but they would definitely lose if the battle dragged on.

She had no intention of challenging the commander of a knight band in an unfamiliar machine. With no telling how long the Karrdator on her side could fend off the red rabbits, she had given up on escaping with all the Tellestarles.

“There’s no choice, those who can still move follow me!!”

Instead of fighting with the advantage in numbers, Kerhild prioritized on keeping the machines intact. That was the difference in principles between ‘knights’ and ‘spies’. Their goal was not to defeat the enemy, battle was just a means to stall for time and a means to ensure safety. Kerhild treated all her subordinates on the field as a way to ‘restrain’ the enemy, firing randomly as she skirted around the battlefield, running towards the unguarded gates.

Several shots destroyed the gates from the inside, making it lose its function as a door. A total of three Tellestarle piloted by Kerhild and her underlings ran onto the road in the night, beginning their escape.

After breaking out from the chaotic fort, Kerhild and the others were not followed, so they just needed to follow the pre arranged route to escape. They didn’t take all the new models, but they still managed to get three. On the flip side, most of the copper fang knights stayed behind to stall for time, sacrificing almost all the combatants, but this was within their expectations.

The copper fang knights was a group that took on covert operations and lacked professional fighting prowess. The ‘Wendebadalla’ that took them much effort to smuggle in were their only direct combat units. Using these limited resources to infiltrate a foreign nations fort and capturing their machines. Considering the cons of the operation such as the difficulty in piloting Tellestarle, ‘just’ losing the entire band of knights was a great deal.

Things were proceeding smoothly, but Kerhild was filled with emotions and sighed with a complicated feeling of easiness, satisfaction, dissatisfaction and regret. She ignored the casualty of her knights for the moment, shaking her head and thinking about her next move. She had to link up with the ‘Wendebadalla’ team standing by in Acquart forest. With strong steps, they commanded the Tellestarle to run, their movement stiff but fast.

Thin clouds covered the sky, the moon that was almost full illuminated the road by their feet. Three Tellestarle forged ahead without a word. Only the sound of the Silhouette knights’ footsteps could be heard. It was close to their rally point at the entrance of the forest. When Kerhild was about to slow down the pace, she saw a red and white figure in the distance.

The moon was bright tonight and the road far ahead was visible. Even without moonlight, Kerhild had been trained to move in the dark and identified the true identity behind the faint light were Silhouette knights. In the path of their escape route, A red and white Silhouette knights were heading in the direction of the fort.

Tch! I didn’t hear anything about reinforcement!! Why are there Silhouette knights at a place like this!?

With all the combat units of fort Casadesus tied up, there shouldn't be any pursuers. With the long distance to the other forts, even if they sent an urgent message over calling for aid, the intruders would probably be gone from Fremmevira by the time help arrives. Traveling at night was fraught with danger and would be avoided unless it's an urgent matter. Kerhild couldn't understand why she would encounter Silhouette knight at such a place. The enemy units that popped up made her agitated, Kerhild didn't know how much time her underlings at the fort could buy her. Right now, the thing they were lacking the most was time.

Without the option of lying her way through, Kerhild decided to get rid of the obstacle. She signaled to her underlings and they nodded in silence. The three Tellestarle deployed their back weapons and attacked the red and white Silhouette knights without warning.

Turning time back moments earlier.

Setting off from Laihiala pilot academy, the carriage ferrying the Boss and the twins, together with Guyale and Earlecumber had a smooth journey. Fort Casadesus was right before them, and they didn't meet with much trouble. With the destination right before them, the group was starting to get careless.

"This is much smoother compared to the previous trip."

"We had a hard time back then. I won't welcome the shaker worms visiting now."

"... You would probably not prefer the shaker worms to visit ever at all."

It was getting dark. Fortunately, the group could advance under the bright moon light. It was taboo to travel at night, but they still persevered on marching towards fort Casadesus that was not far ahead. They were a small group that could travel easily. Even with the Silhouette knight escorts, they only had a carriage and a cargo wagon.

They moved while they chatted-- and suddenly noticed an abnormality in front of them. The sound of heavy metal clanking came from the depths of the darkness along with sharp screeches, familiar sounds for a pilot-- the sound of Silhouette knights churning. As they wondered who was running about recklessly in the night, without realizing they were doing the same as well.

The sound of footfalls became larger, the other party came close enough to be discerned in no time. They watched with bated breath as they identified the Silhouette knights appearing before them to be the new models built by them, and placed under the charge of fort Casadesus. Not understanding why the other party was charging at them in full speed, they were surprised and confused.

Even if something happened and there was a need to send the combat units out, they won't use the new models which was in the minority for the task. Furthermore, the pilots stationed at the fort were not trained to operate them, so there was no reason for them to use these special machines.

"What do you think, Di?"

"No idea, let's ask them."

They decided to confirm the situation, which was the best judgement they could make. But what happened next was beyond their expectation. The approaching Tellestarle deployed their back weapons. Kerhild and the others on the Tellestarle would never stop at this place, so they naturally attacked the machines before them. The unexpected attack from the back weapon had been more effective than melee combat so far.

This shocked Edgar and Dietrich, they would never dream that they would be attacked by their allies' Tellestarle. They reacted in time because of their familiarity with this machine and the back weapons.

Dietrich who was piloting the reformed Guyale aside, Edgar who was piloting the old model reacted splendidly. Guyale drew his sword and deflected the shots with excellent swordsmanship; Earlecumber raised its shield, blocking the shots Guyale missed, protecting the carriage behind.

Seeing her opponent fending off the attack, Kerhild clicked her tongue and had to stop. Earlecumber opposed them from a distance. Edgar opened the cover to the sound amplifier.

“... We are cadets from Laihiala pilot academy with business with the red rabbit knights, on our way to fort Casadesus. Why have you attacked us without identifying yourselves?! Please tell us if your reasons are just!!”

After hearing the angry speech from Edgar, the Tellestarle remained ominously silent. Kerhild had nothing to say to them. But after hearing that, she finally knew where the red and white Silhouette knight hailed from. She was relieved the opponents weren't professional knights. They should be avoiding battle, but before her were just two school trainer models, so she decided to break through with their superior skills. Tellestarles' power were also a big threat, even without any gimmicks, just crashing into them would leave any knight or cadet's machine severely damaged. They had gradually gotten used to the movements of the machine and don't thought much about their adversary, preparing to assault from the front.

But they didn't thought about who made the new models they were piloting right now.

“... Edgar.”

“I know, I leave it to you.”

There was no doubt the silent and hostile Tellestarles were enemies. It was sad to slash at the machine they worked so hard to make, but the cadets didn't plan to give up. After the short exchange, the two of them moved out without hesitation. The red Silhouette knight charged ahead with a strong step with the white Silhouette knight following behind.

One Tellestarle took on Guyale, swinging its sword while moving forward. The movement was crude, but fast and strong as well. It should be hard to block, but the Guyale placed one sword behind the other and crossed swords with the Tellestarle, not losing to it in power at all.

The Guyale directed the blow to the side, swinging its sword down diagonally. The Tellestarle's mighty blow was parried to the side, causing it to lose the balance on its upper body. The copper fang knight member tried pulling back the arms, but it wasn't fast enough. The Tellestarle full of openings took the attack of Guyale's dual sword, the flowing steel blade seemed to be pulled to the Tellestarle's right arm, cutting it off at the joints. For the Tellestarle that used its left arm to wield a shield, it was as good as losing its primary means of attack.

The face of the copper fang knights member twisted from shock. He was experiencing how Molten felt earlier-- the opponent's power output was on par with his. But there was a reason why this soldier had survived this long in the battlefield-- he forcefully pulled back the falling machine and deployed its back weapon in an attempt to retaliate.

“Back weapons are strong, but the way you are using it is too naive!”

Dietrich shouted and deployed Guyale's back weapon first. The Silhouette arms resting on its shoulders looked like short swords with a broad body. Dietrich took aim through the reticle displayed on the holo monitor and squeezed the trigger on the control stick.

The Silhouette arms which received the command fired the magic shot out. It hit the back weapon of its adversary that was just about to shoot, the impact from the vacuum tear at it, destroying the Silhouette arms

of the Tellestarle. It was already off balanced, and with the blow to its upper body, it felt onto its back immediately. This exchange only took a few seconds.

When that Tellestarle was clashing with Guyale, Earlecumber blocked the way of the other two machines. As they might hit their allies during melee combat, the other two Tellestarle turned their attention to Earlecumber. Even though it was two on one, and the enemies were using the new models, Edgar's action didn't seem wise. To exterminate Earlecumber, the Tellestarle Kerhild was piloting raised its sword while the other deployed its back weapon, planning to attack in unison.

But Earlecumber didn't move as they expected-- Earlecumber stopped in its tracks halfway and shot at the ground with the Silhouette arms 'Culverin'. The spell exploded casting dust and debris in the air, using the smoke screen to blind the enemy.

"What cheap tricks!"

Kerhild moved her machine back, the shots from the other machine failed to hit Earlecumber, flying through thin air. Earlecumber took a step back, raising its shield in defence. It was obviously baiting an attack, which made Kerhild hesitate.

At this moment, a sound of something flying could be heard. Turning their heads, they could see Guyale attacking steadily, and the Tellestarle which fell to its blow. Kerhild didn't expect the new models to lose to a cadet trainer so easily. In her anxiety, she thought of a possibility.

"Could this be... a new model!? I didn't hear about this, so there are more!?"

There was no way she would know, the construction of this machine wasn't planned; and she would definitely not know it was a pair of willful twins that brought the red knight to this place.

When she realized what her adversaries were, she found her side in a tough situation. The opponent was the same models as Tellestarle, from the looks of things, the pilot was very familiar with it. Compared to them who were new to the controls, meeting a skilled pilot was a nightmare. They had fallen into a trap, the white machine was obviously a bait. While it was luring the enemy in and defending, the powerful red machine hunted down the other machine. Being tricked because of her carelessness made Kerhild ground her teeth, but the situation wouldn't change for the better like this. Could she defeat the red machine in the machine she couldn't control skillfully? She was not optimistic enough to bet on this possibility.

Even at this critical juncture, they still found a weakness: the red machine was a new model, but the white one wasn't. They could tell from the way they fought earlier. If that was the case, if they could stop the red machine, it was possible to take down the white one. The next move was a gamble for them.

Unfazed even when their allies had fallen and showing more spirit than before-- facing such cautious enemies, Edgar and Dietrich carefully took their stance. Both sides were looking for an opening and the battle became a stalemate.

If there was a god of fate, it has not forsaken Kerhild. Something unexpected happened.

"Ughhhhhhh!!!"

The machine brought down by Guyale roared and sat up. It was a big matter for a Silhouette knight to fall. When seated inside the cockpit of a ten meter tall Silhouette knight, the pilot would be badly hurt if the machine fell over. Even with the protection of physical boost within the Silhouette knight, the injury shouldn't be something you can shake off and start moving again. Dietrich who thought he had dealt with the enemy was caught off guard.

“What!? How tenacious!!”

The Tellestarle charged with its shoulder down from the side, crashing into Guyale and bringing it down. The others couldn't react to the sudden development.

“How persistent! Di, are you okay!?”

“Well done!”

Earlecumber adopted a defensive stance. It was two on one again, and the enemy had Tellestarles, so Edgar had to prioritize on defending himself.

Kerhild and his underlings fired their back weapon at the ground unhesitantly, paying back what Earlecumber did earlier. A cloud of dust raised in the road that was only illuminated by moonlight. Edgar retreated further, a random barrage by the enemy would be dangerous enough. He lifted his shield in defence, but the shots didn't come and only the heavy footsteps moving gradually away could be heard. Using this chance while Guyale was hindered, Kerhild chose to escape.

“Ugh... Edgar!! Ugh, you bastard, stop bothering me!!”

Dietrich who managed to break the fall when his machine fell was conscious, but unable to move Guyale. Even though the Tellestarle that collided with him was half destroyed, it was still a new model. The distance was too close for him to gain an advantage with his piloting skills. With their powers evenly match, Guyale was pressed firmly onto the ground.

“Cough! Fu haha... don't need to hurry student, play with me a little...”

As he spoke, he climbed onto the back of the anxious Dietrich. No matter how skilled Edgar was, the lone Earlecumber couldn't take on the two Tellestarle.

“Ke! This is dangerous, but I have to do this, get out of my face!!”

Under the extremely close distance, Dietrich didn't think about his own safety and fired the ‘Kamtha’ mounted on the back weapon. The air that rushed into the vacuum became a burst of wind, the impact hitting both machines.

While Guyale and Earlecumber was battling the Tellestarle, the boss and the others fled from the scene in their carriage, heading straight for fort Casadesus. If they get dragged into the battle between Silhouette knights, the carriage won't even last a second. If there were Tellestarle out here, the chances that something was up at the fort was high, and they had nowhere else to go anyway.

The horse was foaming at the mouth as it sprinted while dragging the fully loaded cargo. The canvas covering the cargo wagon snapped off, revealing an armored figure secured with steel wires beneath standing up. It was the strangely shaped, 2.5m tall Silhouette gear-- Motor beat.

And the one activating it were Chid and Ady. They brought their equipped weapon-- portable ballista along under their arms, and carried a bag of spare rounds on their back, jumping off the wagon and started sprinting. True to its description of ‘faster than a horse’, the heavy armor sprinted with amazing speed. After training so much with Eru and the continual training with Silhouette gear, running was a piece of cake.

Edgar was chasing the fleeing Tellestarle and noticed footfalls in the surrounding. Two figures smaller than the Silhouette knights appeared on both side of Earlecumber. Turning the neck of the machine, Edgar discovered the Silhouette gear that was about the height of a Silhouette knight's knee were running alongside. Forgetting the situation because of his anger, he roared:

“Wha... You two! What are you doing!”

“As you can see, Edgar Senpai, we are going after the thieves.”

“That’s right. They have two machines, so we will take care of one!”

The two of them chasing behind the back of the steel green figures into the forest, running under the sporadic moonlight as they answered.

“What nonsense is this! I don’t care how good you are, the opponents are Silhouette knights, the strongest weapon of humanity!? It’s too dangerous, leave the thieves to me, so go back!!”

“But Edgar senpai would be dealing with two of that things alone then.”

Edgar groaned and didn’t know how to answer. The intruders chose to flee as they were unfamiliar with the controls. But if the two machines attack Edgar together, he would be at an disadvantage. The serious Edgar was dumbfounded when he faced situations he didn’t know how to deal with.

“It’s not just Edgar Senpai, we are angry too.”

“This was made by everyone right? To steal that thing away, unforgivable!!”

Edgar felt the same and couldn’t find the words to convince the twins otherwise. After pondering it over, the situation didn’t allow Edgar to waste time, and these two weren’t that obedient and wouldn’t follow what he said. Making up his mind, he reluctantly said:

“... Don’t be reckless and fight them head on. Focus on providing me with support, prioritize your own safety at all times!! Got it?”

“Yes, we will definitely ‘not be reckless’, Edgar Senpai!”

“Right, we will ‘only provide support’, Edgar Senpai!”

The forest became denser and the night was getting darker. This incident stirred up by the new Silhouette knight model that involved people from a number of factions was heading towards the end.

特列斯塔爾 Tellestarle

Main Pilot / Helvi Öberg

spec

Height / 9.8m

Weight / 18.9t

Equipment / Swords

Axe, Shield, Auxiliary
arm, Back Weapon

Magic Armament

'Culverin'



explanation

Prototype Silhouette Knight built by the students of Laihiala Pilot Academy, it has functionality that was never seen before. It's power output is on par with the old heavy models, but its magic armament attack was much stronger. It also have its share of weakness, such as rough controls, expends mana rapidly and the short operation time. Its design was heralded as the coming of the next generation of Silhouette Knights, and was the reason behind a certain incident.

Chapter 17 - Battle in the forest

While Edgar was chasing the Tellestarles in his Earlecumber, the battle in fort Casadesus between the Copper fang knights and the Red rabbit knights was entering its climax. The wreckage of defeated Silhouette knights was littered all over the floor, the fire shot from the Silhouette arms dyed the battlefield orange.

Ernesti observed the intense fight from the damaged workshop. Usually, Eru would be shining with joy from watching the Silhouette knights battle. But right now, his face was full of regret.

“... They destroyed the machines they couldn’t seize, how thorough.”

On the floor behind him were several Karrdator that were destroyed by the copper fang knights. Eru’s gaze kept switching between the wreckage and the battle.

“Silhouette knights are having a large scale battle in front of me, but I don’t have a machine. A pity, such a pity. I will just charge in without one. But joining a fight between robots without piloting one is too unsightly! That’s unforgivable... But without the all-important machine...”

Eru lifted his head towards the sky, sighing in the deepest regret ever in his entire life. After giving his all towards robots, he couldn’t forgive himself for watching two opposing groups of robots battling and not taking part. But joining the fray without a machine of his own is against his sense of aesthetics.

That was why he barged into the workshop shortly after the battle started, but he could only see wreckage all around him, depressing him further.

As he was filled with regret, the knights in the courtyard was falling one by one, and the fight would be over if this goes on. Pressured by his feelings of anxiety, he made a decision.

“... Alright, I will steal a machine that is currently in operation! There is nothing I can’t do if I put my mind to it!!”

Once he made his decision, Eru acted swiftly. He fired a human sized anchor wire and leapt onto the roof, observing the battlefield from there closely. Even with Eru’s skill, it was mission impossible to steal a Silhouette knight that was being operated. With the persistence of a snake, agility of an eagle and the silence of a spider, he waited for the chance to come.

At this moment, Eru noticed something moving from the corner of his eyes. It wasn’t in the courtyard where the Silhouette knights were fighting, but from the vicinity of the gate that was destroyed by the Tellestarle. Looking closely, he could see two carriages hurrying in through the debris of the gate.

Some weirdoes who were visiting the fort when there was a fight going on. Eru’s puzzlement didn’t last for long as he spied some ‘object’ that looked familiar on the cargo wagon. His eyes opened wide with surprised for a moment, and jumped into the air. The silver flash left the sound of an explosion behind and moved in the night sky.

“Hey, can’t we go faster!?”

“This is the limit boss! The horses will fall if we go any faster!!”

A carriage was sprinting along the paved road with extraordinary speed. The boss who stuck his head out from within was urging the student to accelerate. The horses pushed to run at full speed were already

foaming at the mouth as they ran, moments before they will collapse from exhaustion. But the group had a reason why they had to rush.

During this period of time, Edgar and Dietrich were fighting the Tellestarle that attacked them while they were traveling. The boss had to report this to the fort.

But when the group reached the vicinity of the fort, they were dumbfounded. Fort Casadesus which reigned over the Acquart forest was glowing bright in the dark from the flames that erupted all over.

“Hey, what in the...”

Fortunately, they arrived at fort Casadesus before the horses fell from exhaustion. Before them was the destroyed gate, burning buildings and the intense fight between Silhouette knights. They couldn't understand the situation and just remained in place. They were seeking refuge at the fort from a fight between Silhouette knights, but there was no telling if it was safe inside either.

A silver bullet landed before them as they stood there baffled. Eru used 'air suppression' to cushion his fall after leaping down from up high, landing steadily before them. The series of sudden events made the group stunned, and the silver bullet asked while tilting his head:

“I was wondering who it was, isn't this the boss? What are you doing here? This is a battlefield here.”

“Ah, silver boy!! What is happening here!?”

Eru calmed the boss who was on the verge of pouncing on him, smiling awkwardly as he explained:

“I don't really understand too. I heard there were thieves entering the fort with Karrdators while posing as the red rabbit knights. They occupied the workshop, stole the Silhouette knights and created this disaster.”

As he was explaining, the flash of Overed spells and explosions continued, the chaos was still ongoing. The boss and the students listened to Eru with their back to the battlefield. The expression of the boss suddenly changed.

“... Oh right, it's the Tellestarle... We encountered Tellestarle on our way here, and they attacked us without any warning!! Edgar and Di intercepted them, but I don't know what happened next. Were they the thieves!?”

The boss clenched his fist furiously while Eru besides him nodded, seeming to understand something.

“I see, so the thieves were targeting Tellestarle... No, I should say the 'new model'... This is a 'robbing incident', what a blind spot. I didn't think such a 'cliche' would happen to me.”

Luckily, Eru's mutterings were covered by the noise on the battlefield and the boss didn't hear it. There was no telling how they would feel if they were to hear that, but right now, the boss who didn't know that was full of wrath. He remembered something and turned to Eru.

“And what are you doing?”

“I am looking for a Silhouette knight. Remember that I said the thieves occupied the workshop? The machines they didn't used were all destroyed... I couldn't do anything but bite on my fingers as the Silhouette knights fought before me. The actions of the thieves were rational, but it made me so furious. I was flying around looking to rob a Silhouette knight... Well...”

Eru ended his explanation and looked at what's behind the boss. He pointed at the wagon with an ominous smile.

“The armor on the wagon... is ‘my Motor Beat’, right?”

The boss stroked his beard. The last cargo on the wagon was the blue armor only Eru could use.

“Yeah, the little ones asked me to bring it along. Oh right, they took off to chase the Tellestarle.”

“They are here too? And they are chasing the Tellestarle? How envi... cough cough, dangerous, I have to help them right now!!”

“Hey you are enjoying this too much... yup, he is not listening.”

Eru gave a perfunctory acknowledgement and boarded onto his Motor beat. After the chest armor closed, mana flowed through its entire body and it stood up slowly as the crystal tissue contracted. The boss couldn't see Eru who was behind the armor, but a joyous voice came from inside, and it was easy to imagine Eru's expression.

“Activation complete... With a machine, everything... everything would be alright. Let's have a good fight. I will settle things on this side and then assist them... Let's go!!”

Before finishing his sentence, Motor beat jumped with enough force to almost crush the carriage. The churning sound of the winch overlapped with the noise of compressed air jettisoning, extending the wire anchor into the night sky, guiding Motor beat onto the battlefield. Under the shine of the moonlight, its armor had a blue glint that was prominent even in the light from the sea of fire.

The boss spent quite a while chasing the figure of Motor beat leaping onto the roof and running. He sighed in resignation, turned around and said:

“I don't think a duel level demon beast is as scary as him. Eh, there's no need to sympathize with the thieves... There's nothing else we can do, let's escape.”

The group came to their senses after hearing him and rushed to the entrance of the fort.

The owl hooted and the nocturnal wild animals lifted their heads towards the skies. Under the bright moonlight, the aura of a battle crept into the usually peaceful Acquart forest.

The giant intruder made from steel and crystal tissue barged through the forest. They knocked away branches getting in their way, flattening everything under their feet, shaking the ground. Kerhild Hietakangas, the captain of the copper fang knights had a sour face while piloting her sprinting Silhouette knight-- Tellestarle. She tightened her grip on the control stick and relaxed the pedal which was pushed to the limits.

“Tch! It would be bad to continue running like this.”

From fort Casadesus to this place, she had piloted Tellestarle and ran for quite a long distance. That was why she noticed the machine losing the speed it had in the beginning, it was a sign of the mana pool of the Tellestarle gradually drying up.

There was still quite some distance before reaching the rendezvous point with the Wendebadalla. If she carried on like this, the mana would be exhausted before she reached the destination and forced to stop all movements. No matter how high the power output was-- No, the high power output, the new models was the cause for the mana capacity problem. The Tellestarle didn't have enough mana pool right now, its biggest weak point still remained unsolved. Kerhild didn't care about all this, instead of the theory, she was more concerned with the depleting mana.

“We probably can’t run anymore... I really don’t want to use this thing to fight.”

If she pushed on, there was a good chance her mana would deplete when the pursuers caught up. At that point, they would definitely lose even if the opponent wasn’t a new model. She decided to crush the pursuers completely before that happens, escaping would lead to inevitable defeat. Clicking her tongue, she gave a gesture to her underlings, stopped the Tellestarle and turned around. Apart from the churning of the ether reactor, the forest was quiet once again. Kerhild glared at the approaching white Silhouette knight on the holo monitor that seemed to be walking casually.

On the pilot seat of Earlecumber-- the white Silhouette knight, Edgar saw the Tellestarle decelerating and smiled.

“... Seems like their mana pool is running low.”

The two Tellestarle gave up on escaping and waited for Edgar to come. As someone who ‘experienced’ the same problem, Edgar guess was on point.

“We still have plenty of mana left, so we have the advantage in that area. I will attack straight on, you two focus on disruption and support. Do not charge in!!”

The Silhouette gear running by the feet of the Silhouette knight saluted half-heartedly and disappeared into the forest. Edgar suppressed his sigh and focused on the Tellestarle, attempting to conceal the movement behind the trees. Shots from the Tellestarle went through the forest, creating large explosion when they hit the trees. But Earlecumber didn’t even raise its shield, closing the distance fearlessly.

“Tch! He saw right through us!!”

Realizing the shots from the back weapon were just a waste of mana, Kerhild yelled in frustration, withdrawing it. Unlike the red rabbit knights, the cadet was inexperienced, but familiar with Tellestarle. It was a tougher opponent than she imagined. All the tactics Kerhild could think of were within the expectation of the enemy, and resolved it one at a time. Even though her machine had better performance, she was still pushed to this stage.

“Split up, pincer attack!”

She decided to fight straight up in the end, utilizing the number advantage to the fullest. The band member nodded and attacked Earlecumber.

In the dark forest, it was easy to find a Silhouette knight that reflects light faintly. The presence of a ten meter tall body was difficult to conceal even in the darkness. Edgar noticed the pincer movement from the Tellestarles immediately. He maneuvered Earlecumber deftly, not letting himself become a target. Edgar closed in on one of the enemy-- the Tellestarle piloted by Kerhild.

There was no way the Tellestarle would stay at the same spot and wait for him, and kept changing its position. Earlecumber used the woods as barriers and avoided fighting two machines at the same time. The copper fang knight member accelerated his Tellestarle, attempting to flank to the back of Earlecumber. The three Silhouette knight didn’t engage as they moved around the forest searching for the best position.

Something was moving around the forest, concealed by the noise from the three Silhouette knight. It was an armor one quarter of the height of Silhouette knight-- the Silhouette gear, Motor beat. Chid and Ady hid themselves from the enemy, approaching quietly from behind. Chid was slightly out of the Silhouette knight’s attack range, observing from behind the trees, calming his shallow breath and racing heart.

Looking from this angle, the Silhouette knights are really huge...

Chid spent a lot of time with Eru in the pilot faculty, so he had plenty of chances to see Silhouette knights and had gotten used to it. But seeing it as a hostile enemy, the machine's size and prowess made Chid intensely nervous. Silhouette knights were the strongest weapon of humanity, which meant there were no other human weapons that could match the Silhouette knight. The ability of the Silhouette gears was still unknown, but judging from pure combat power, it couldn't stand up to Silhouette knights.

A strong and big adversary... When Eru was fighting the behemoth, it probably felt like this.

Chid took a deep breath, drawing the sword from the back of his machine as if he wanted to sever the fear in his heart. The blade was longer than two meters, an oversized two handed sword. There wasn't any weapon that suited a Silhouette gear, this was something he dug up from the warehouse in a hurry. The giant sword difficult for men to handle was just the right size in the hands of the Silhouette gear.

I can't run now. The people who took Tellestarle are infuriating, I will never catch up with teacher if I back down now, let's do this!!

Chid breathed in deeply and rested the sword on his shoulder. Someone called out to him. Not far away, he could see Ady hiding herself with her ballista, and waved at her with his sword.

"Okay, let's do this!"

Chid's Motor Beat (MB) raised its arms and shot out the anchor wire with a soft bang. The arrow head with crystal tissue built inside flew to the top of the trees nearby, embedding into a Y-shaped tree firmly. Chid jumped with the roar of the winch churning. Ady who was one step behind came out from the trees, aiming her portable ballista.

"We need to 'support' properly!"

Chid's MB reached the top of the trees, kicked at the branch, and charged ahead. At the same time, Ady's MB started attacking from range. Steel arrows flew through the air, splitting it.

The two Tellestarle worked in concert, forcing Earlecumber into a corner. Earlecumber couldn't overcome the difference in numbers, taking a few steps back. If the situation didn't improve, the pilots would be under tremendous mental pressure. Despite risking death with any wrong move, Edgar who was piloting Earlecumber was as cool as a cucumber, showing a serious face and strong concentration. He was at an overwhelming disadvantage, but he refused to give up, waiting for the chance to counterattack. His strong determination frustrated Kerhild and her minions who outnumbered him.

The opportunity presented itself at this moment.

Kerhild and the copper fang member were focusing on Earlecumber since there were no signs of other machines. The band member raised its sword, attempting to attack the back of Earlecumber again. Closing in, he aimed the sword at Earlecumber's back.

After taking the first step, something flashed between Earlecumber and Tellestarle. From the faint moonlight in the woods, that thing reflected a threatening metallic light. It landed on the trees in front of the band member with a thud, shaking the entire tree.

"An attack!? Enemy reinforcement!!"

The shocked band member pulled back his leg. There was another forces beside them and were clearly hostile to the Tellestarle. This was a huge surprise to them, as the Tellestarle could afford to do a pincer attack because of their numerical advantage. The appearance of another enemy overturned this, making them hesitant to proceed as they searched for the unseen enemy.

Seeing this, the twins smiled. The attack just now halted the movement of the band member, which was their plan all along. Chid's MB was moving at high speed above the Silhouette knight's head, kicking off the trees to accelerate. It then raised its sword, aiming for the head of the Tellestarle.

“Woooahhh!!”

As the band member turned its head searching the surrounding, something humanoid was flying at him with amazing speed. The unexpected attack surprised him and he tried to dodge by twisting the body of the machine. The machine stopped in its track and turned its head unnaturally. The extended two handed sword stabbed at the inside of the helmet, creating screeching sounds and sparks. The Silhouette knights were tough with its utilization of physical boost magic, not only did this blow not leave much damage, the crystal eye was as good as new. But the unnatural evasive movement made the Tellestarle lose its balance.

The twins didn't let this good chance get away and continued attacking. Ady's MB was standing firmly at a place close by, lowering her centre of gravity as she aimed her ballista, firing without hesitation. Lock and load, whenever the dull sound of energy being released arises, giant arrows that could easily be mistaken as lances shot skywards. The earlier shot had given her the bearing, allowing Ady to unleash a storm of arrows at the unbalanced Tellestarle.

Seeing the copper fang band member's Tellestarle being toyed by the attacks from the Silhouette gear, Edgar changed his cautious approach and closed in on Kerhild's machine in an instant. He didn't know how long the twins could tie up the band member's machine, so he had to fully utilize this opportunity and take some risks.

“Prepare to die!”

The sudden ambush and the cadet who switched to the offensive made Kerhild more frustrated than before.

“These rascals!! Don't look down on us!!”

Unlike the hesitation earlier, the Tellestarle's sword was full of terrifying power. The change was incredible.

Facing this attack, Earlecumber didn't dodge and took the hit head on. Tellestarle's power was on par with the heavier models, so Edgar will definitely lose in a direct confrontation. Other than arm power, Edgar put all its weight behind the sword, stopping Tellestarle's sword for an instant. This was Edgar's anti new model skill he came up with by researching his past experience. It would be useless once the opponent became aware of it, so he couldn't repeat it too often, a double edged sword. That's why Edgar chose to show his hand to his adversary at the very beginning. The stalemate would be broken once the Tellestarle used more power. Before the Tellestarle could do that, Earlecumber pushed his sword down, bring the Tellestarle's sword along too.

“This guy!?”

Earlecumber's left hand that was holding the shield withdrew, and pushed out towards the Tellestarle with great force. This was known as a blah shield, the kite shaped shield had a horn on its surface. Although it was blunt, it still made a simple bashing weapon. And of course, Edgar aimed for the arm. The arms were closely related to the attack power, and structurally speaking, they were weaker than the other parts.

A weird sound came from the arm of Tellestarle. The idea of a follow up attack flashed through Edgar's mind, but he turned and backed away instead. The next second, a barrage of spells from the back weapon landed at where Edgar was standing at moments earlier.

“It's not going that well...”

Edgar observed his opponent calmly, and his face twisted bitterly when he realized something. The enemy didn't realize his shock and retracted the back weapon and didn't pursue. Edgar's earlier attack didn't cause critical damage, the arm seemed serviceable and the sword was still gripped tightly in its hand. Tellestarle's calm and ominous silence changed Edgar's shock into caution.

"My apologies to you, cadet."

The Tellestarle said suddenly. There was no emotional fluctuation, the steady tone made Edgar even more cautious.

"To be honest, I had been underestimating you because you are a cadet. In the end, you have proven to be really capable."

The movement of the Tellestarle became slower as it took up a stance, the stiffness in its movement disappeared. Even with an unfamiliar machine, Kerhild had gotten used to it after running such a long distance with it. That's right she was the commander of the copper fang knights- it might not be a regular band of knights, but the title wouldn't be bestowed on one without ability.

"As my apology, I will show it to you. I might have gotten rusty from lack of use... watch this, 'fang of the copper snake'!!"

Before she finished speaking, Tellestarle attacked with movements that were faster than her initial strike. The fierce attack was sudden and took everything Earlecumber had to withstand it.

"Strong! It's a tough opponent!!"

Earlecumber kept a safe distance and defended with its shield probing the next step it should make. The white and steel colored Silhouette moved at the same time, sprinting with the roar of their machines.

The copper fang knights member who was listening to the fight between Earlecumber and Tellestarle from a distance was yelling angrily from an unexpected development of events:

"These things keep squirming around!"

He could hear the sound of his enemies kicking the trees echoing in the forest, making it hard to determine their position. The copper fang knight swung his sword wildly in frustration, but didn't hit them. At this moment, another giant lance hit the outer skin of the Tellestarle, causing sparks.

This situation had been going on for quite some time. There were two opponents, one with a melee weapon flying around the forest; the other firing arrows as big as lance from afar, working together seamlessly. Their teamwork toyed the band member around completely.

The size of the adversaries was much smaller than a Silhouette knight, but this was an advantage in concealing oneself in the forest, helping with the sneak attacks. Their individual attacks were nothing insignificant against the Silhouette knight's armor reinforced by magic, making it seem tougher than it looks. But a hit to the joints would be critical even for a Silhouette knight.

They couldn't deal significant damage with their attacks, but they were still a dangerous presence that couldn't be ignored. Unfortunately, the copper fang knight thought the opponents were too small and could be dealt with in one hit. While he was aiming at the enemy jumping through the sky, a barrage of lance attack fell on his unguarded back.

The worst thing was the Tellestarle he was piloting had Silhouette arms on its back. The intrinsic engraving and low endurance couldn't withstand the burst of lances, and lost its functionality from the damage.

Realizing things were getting dangerous, the copper fang knight went on the defensive. But it was too late. The Tellestarle had lost one of its advantages. Even though he adopted a defensive position, it resulted in him being attacked one sidedly.

The copper fang knight member was as furious as a wild beast pricked in the butt and he thought about how to take down these damn enemies. The enemy in charge of long distance attacks was cautious and kept a certain distance, and would flee if he went near. He should dispose of the opponent in melee range. But if he couldn't stop that thing's movement, or at least keep up with the opponent speed with his eyes, the plan would end there. While the knight was forcing his mind that was burning from anger to think, the enemies' attack continued, fuelling his wrath.

Suddenly, a ray of moonlight shone through the trees onto the Tellestarle's crystal eye. The knight saw the image captured by the holo monitor and inspiration struck. His expression was like a wild beast that found a prey and couldn't wait to pounce.

After his numerous attack got deflected, Chid had given up on denting the tough Silhouette knight. Basically, Silhouette gear had about the same attack power as humans, it's not possible to defeat Silhouette knights with it. Even though Chid tried increasing speed and aimed for the weak joints, the Tellestarle wasn't foolish enough to allow that.

Edgar senpai is right, we could only stall for time. That should be enough, but I still can't--

Chid's MB accelerated by swinging on the wire anchor and jumped. He unhatched the arrow head embedded on the tree and stopped on the next tree with a great force. Chid focused and kicked at the tree branch to accelerate, attacking the Tellestarle that had turned around to defend against the attack from Ady's MB. The attack aiming for the shoulder joints was blocked, ending in failure.

As Chid's MB was preparing to retreat, the Tellestarle behind was moving in a different way than before. It had probably lost its composure, swinging its sword wildly. The vegetation was thick in this area, the random attacks won't hit Chid's MB. The power stemming from the strand crystal tissue bashed the trees and branches, sending it all over the place.

"What's with that, it's dangerous--"

Does he really think it will hit just by swinging wildly? Chid felt the pilot of the Tellestarle had lost his cool and laughed lightly. He understood how his opponent felt, as Chid couldn't bring the Tellestarle down and was troubled too. The Tellestarle kept repeating its movement, felling some of the trees, but it didn't affect Chid's movement. The accelerating Chid approached the Tellestarle once again.

Just as the knight expected, the Silhouette gear reflected the moonlight as it charged into the edge of the trees. It was bright in the dim forest, marking its position clearly to the knight who was watching the surrounding.

"There you are!! Found you!!"

The knight who was toyed with swung his sword with all his wrath. It was a fatal situation for the MB that was using the darkness of the forest and its small size. Chid kicked the tree in an attempt to change directions, but the sword swinging down was faster than him. The irony was that this attack which contained all the hate and anger of the knight was more powerful than any of his previous attacks.

"Chid--!"

Ady stared with her eyes wide and screamed. She was hesitant about taking action, but it was too late to attack with the mobile Ballista now. Ady hung on to faint hope and ran.

Chid felt all the blood in his body flowing backwards as he stared at the sword of the giant that was closing in with frightening speed. He remembered something. It was related to his teacher-- Eru. The advantage Eru had was his agility and magic abilities. Didn't Eru teach him the spell to 'accelerate in mid-air without footholds'?

“Waarrgghh!!”

Silhouette gears was a structure made from metal frame and operated by crystal tissue, while crystal tissues were a catalyst that acted as a medium to draw out magic.

Chid kicked out his legs strongly, channelling his mana into the crystal tissue powering the legs. At the same time, an architect spell showed itself splendidly. With no regards for force or control, the burst of air explode like a bomb. The spell named by Eru as Air thrust violently twisted the momentum of Chid's MB. The diagonal slash of the giant's blade went through the space Chid's MB was in moments earlier with destructive force.

“Wooahhh--!?”

Chid who almost died under the sword went out of control in mid-air. He wasn't used to flying in the air like Eru, and couldn't follow up after forcing himself to use a skill he was not familiar with. Betting on a lifeline, Chid shot out his wire anchor as he was spinning out of control.

Fortunately, the wire anchor latched into a tree branch securely, and would allow Chid to regain his balance by retracting it. But before Chid could put this into action, he faced the problem of his wire anchor running out.

“Kya!”

The wire anchor that had been pulled to its maximum length shook Chid for a moment, the strong momentum made Chid's MB changed its direction to the side. It was anchored to a tree by the wires, spinning around it in mid-air. Confused by the centrifugal force, Chid maintained his speed and saw the ground approaching and scream. He straightened the machine with all his might and moderate force to brake by air compression, learning from his earlier mistake. He followed that with Air suspension-- another magic taught by Eru personally-- and used the air to slow himself down, absorbing the impact with the ground. Chid who was about to crash heavily into the ground managed to make a slow and safe landing.

“Phew... That was close... really close...”

Because he was using large amounts of mana recklessly, Chid panted hard to replenish his mana and calmed his beating heart as he stood up. It's not just the drop in his mana that made him tremble, the near death experience played a part too.

But the current situation didn't allow him a chance to take a break. Tremors that shook the ground and the sound of the footfalls of a giant were drawing nearer. The Tellestarle saw what happened too. The knight piloting Tellestarle thought Chid would crash into the ground and die, but realizing his opponents were hard to handle, he had to confirm Chid's death with his own eyes before relaxing. That's why he was heading towards Chid to land the final blow.

There was no other choice but to escape. Chid forced himself to breath in deep, and activated the Silhouette gear as he breathed out evenly. He tried using the wire anchor to move large distance, but was stunned when he saw the hand of the machine. The anchor that was bounded to the tree when he fell couldn't be used, and didn't work when he pulled at it. Chid gritted his teeth, pulled out the device from his arm. It would just get in his way right now.

Chid squeezed out his last ounce of strength to run, putting as much distance as he could from the attack of the titan.

Ady's MB was sprinting in the forest, kicking up the dirt as she fired her mobile ballista at the Tellestarle going after Chid. But the armor mercilessly deflected all the attacks. It did nothing to stop the Tellestarle, and had no visible effect at all. With both party moving, it would take amazing luck and coincidence for a hit to be effective.

Ady endured the raising anxiety in her heart, and kept firing her ballista nonstop, hoping to stall the enemy. But the Tellestarle was like a hungry beast who found a wounded prey, licking its lips as it approach Chid step by step. Chid's MB appeared to be severely weakened, and it seemed unlikely it could escape. Right now, the only one who could stop the Tellestarle and help Chid would be Ady. With a prayer in her heart, she continued her attack.

But her prayers weren't answered.

The Tellestarle who had locked on to Chid's MB raised its sword again, speeding up in order to deliver the final blow. Just a few more steps and Chid's MB would be within sword range. The Tellestarle took a final giant stride.

Ady's vision was blurred by tears, Chid's MB stopped struggling and the knight was sneering, elated by the prospect of his revenge. Something unexpected happened. There was 'something' behind Chid's MB, right in the path of the Tellestarle, which was Chid's broken wire. The wire was tied securely to the trees at the height of the Silhouette gear-- which was the leg of the Tellestarle.

Not noticing the sudden attack-- the Tellestarle which took the step with all its might entangled the wire, the taut wire stopped the leg of the giant, stopping it in its track. This was the weak point of the bipedal Silhouette knight which walks like humans were fated to have. The Tellestarle who was tripped while shifting its centre of gravity, fell forward just like that.

The copper fang knight pilot was probably lost from his anger and couldn't react in time. The Tellestarle fell forward elegantly, bumping its head into a tree branch with a dull clang. A human would probably die from such a hit. The giant's head maintained this position as it fell, leaving a cloud of dust and sound of a crash in its wake.

"... Eh, what, what happened...?"

"Chid! Chid! Are you alright!? Are you still alive!?"

Chid's jaw was slack the entire time, watching the event unfold behind him. The Tellestarle who fell loudly didn't move, lying prone to the ground amidst the dust.

Ady who arrived a bit late ran to Chid's side. Confirming that Chid was standing stunned in place, she breathe a sigh of relief.

"Great! I thought I wouldn't make it!! Ahh, this is great...!! But, I didn't expect you to prepare such a trap as you were escaping... Amazing, well done Chid!!"

"Ahhh?... Eh?? Ahhh, hmmm? Ohhh, what?"

Compared to Chid who was laughing dryly as he averted his eyes, Ady was all smiles, swinging her arms strongly to express her joy.

"Anyway, let's take care of this fellow."

After that, Chid clenched his slightly trembling hand.

The Tellestarle fell slowly.

It hit a tree on the way down, the copper fang knight who was inside the twisted machine didn't know what happened and panicked. The Tellestarle didn't have time to break the fall and crashed onto the ground directly. Its momentum was slowed when it hit the tree, but the impact from the fall still affected the pilot inside the cockpit. The force coming from his back pushed all the air in his lungs out, making him cough a few times. Thanks to the seatbelt, he was fine after being shaken in his seat. If not for the seat belt, he might have turned into minced meat after tumbling around the cockpit.

After the machine stopped moving, the knight shook his head, and tried to grasp the situation. The head of the machine probably suffered serious damage, the image on the holo monitor was distorted and could disappear anytime. The damage to the entire body wasn't clear, but he knew the reactor was fine from the steady vibration under his seat.

No matter what, the first thing he needed to do was to stand the machine up. Pushing his aching body, the knight reaches for the control stick. Suddenly, the sharp sound of air gushing out was audible. The holo monitor projecting a twisted image was gone as the chest armor opened. Replacing that was the cool night air and the scene of the real world.

Before him was the moon. The knight stared at it, lost for a moment. The almost perfectly spherical moon was exceptionally bright, and someone was standing before it. He still couldn't focus, thinking that this was the giant armored knight that he was fighting all this while.

“Taste my fist of punishment!!”

After hearing an exceptionally young shriek, his vision was filled by the view of an extra large iron fist, and that was the last thing he remembered.

Returning to the scene in Fort Casadesus once again.

After the copper fang knights captain Kerhild accomplished her main objective -- seizing the new model, and had escaped, the rest of the knights that chose to stay behind continued battling the red rabbit knights. The red rabbits were full of wrath towards the invaders who had caused much destruction, determined to wipe them out. If the invaders turned their back, they would definitely be done in by countless swords. That was as good as suicide, so the copper fang knights had no choice but to engage.

But unexpectedly, the battle was still at an impasse. And naturally, they rallied around the two new models that stayed behind. It might be hard to control, but its powerful performance more than made up for this. As the phrase goes, ‘an untamed horse could run fast too’. Facing such tenacious enemies, the red rabbits couldn't hold back their anxiety.

At this moment, a gust of wind swept through the burning battlefield, even knocking the red flames aside. It was a prominent blue whirlwind-- the combo of Silhouette gear Motor Beat and Ernesti. He used the anchor wire to fly around the walls of the fort and observe the situation. Watching from up high, it was easy to identify the enemy from the ally. The one standing with the Tellestarle was the enemy.

He leapt towards the enemy Karrdator nearby. Silhouette gear was one size bigger than humans, but was only a quarter the height of Silhouette knights. He wasn't discovered by the Karrdator when Eru landed softly on its shoulders.

“Good night Mr Thief. I made you wait, let me join in too.”

The knight who was only focusing on the red rabbits was shocked by the sudden appearance of the armored knight appearing on the holo monitor. Before he could understand what was happening, the seemingly large palm of Motor Beat covered the holo monitor. For Silhouette knights, the head exist in order to protect the 'eye crystal'. Naturally, it was covered by helmets and heavily protected by armor.

But the Motor Beat that was smaller than the Silhouette knight reached in through the gaps of the armor and attacked the eye crystal directly. It was too close for the image to focus, the blurry palm was glowing faintly from magic, materializing into a mid tier spell that was more powerful than fireball -- flame strike. No matter how tough the armor of the Silhouette knight was, it wouldn't last long if the insides were attacked directly. The flames filled every corners of his vision before the holo monitor finally lost its light-- the eye crystal was destroyed. With the light source gone, the sealed cockpit fell into darkness. This unexpected development made the copper fang knight panic.

Before the enemy Karrdator could thrash about from confusion, Motor Beat fired the anchor wire to the Tellestarle nearby and swung in the air. With the direction adjusted slightly from air compression, the Motor Beat charged towards the back of the knees of the machine. Before the targeted Tellestarle realized a foreign object was entangling it, Motor Beat had fired a few dozen flame lance into the knee joint, creating a grand explosion at the thinner armor there, breaking the joint. The Motor Beat delivered the final blow with a kick, and the Tellestarle lost balance and fell.

When their comrades including the new model falling one after another, the copper fang knights fell into disarray. The red rabbits couldn't fathom what was happening, but they could see that the strange blue armor was putting on a spectacular performance.

When another Karrdator bent its knee, the copper fang knights finally noticed the full plate armor that was flying around them. They attempted to strike it down with their swords in a hurry, but the blue armor was one step faster than the giant's sword, disappearing from view as if something was pulling it in. The Motor Beat stopped at the top of the fort's wall once again, moving swiftly before attacking the other Tellestarle. Using air suspension while dropping from the blind spot at the top of its head, Eru landed on the shoulder of the machine like a shadow.

In order to fend off the red rabbits, the copper fang knight deployed its back weapon. Eru showed a devious smile. He was the 'proposer' of the back weapon, no one understood its structure and functions more than him. Eru had a way of using this point against his enemies. Keeping his balance, Eru swiftly took out the sub armsauxiliary arms supporting the Silhouette arms, destroying the part equivalent to the 'hands' and pulled on the silver nerve to move the Silhouette arms. Eru deftly manipulated Motor Beat, turning the Silhouette arms that were taller than the Silhouette gear around, pointing it at the other Silhouette arms and securing it.

There was no way the copper fang knight knew his machine was heading towards tragedy. He pulled the trigger without hesitation. The Silhouette arms received adequate mana and Overed spell materialized at its tip. And the tip which was sabotaged by Eru exploded immediately, sending a shock wave as the Silhouette arms exploded. Before the Tellestarle could understand what happened, it was sent flying by the force, falling head first into the ground and stopped moving.

“Tamayaa--¹”

Eru who was on its shoulder moments ago left a cheerful comment as it somersaulted gracefully in the air and landed casually. And so, the outnumbered copper fang knights were taken down in no time. The struggle earlier was like a lie, that's how the victory felt like.

Molten couldn't hold back his sigh of resignation. The invaders he himself couldn't handle were put down like a joke with unorthodox moves-- and the one that did it was a small Silhouette knight imitation he had never seen before. Other than ridiculous, he couldn't think of a better term to describe it. Molten who was

¹ Something you yell when setting off fireworks in Japan

suppressing his frustration couldn't help sighing towards the sky when he saw the figure exiting the blue armor after the battle ended.

"... Ah-- Ernesti, it's you."

He worked very hard to not show any fatigue in his voice. Eru opened the armor of his Silhouette gear Motor Beat. The terrifying thing was that his face dyed in the red glow of the flames was smiling with huge satisfaction.

"Yes, knight commander. Sorry I'm late, I couldn't find a machine just now."

That's not the problem. Molten used his willpower to swallow back these words.

"... No, I need to thank you for helping us with these troublesome enemies. I have much to ask, but let's leave it for later. Since the issue here is settled, we need to chase the ones that ran off... We might not make it in time though."

Molten stroked the neat beard he was proud of and crossed his arms. Quite some time had passed since the thieves who stole the Tellestarle had left. It was normal to assume they were beyond reach.

"As for this, I have something to report to you. The students traveling from Laihiala academy met the Tellestarle who was escaping by chance. They report that they were attacked as they were approaching the suspicious group, and engaged in battle immediately. They should have stalled quite a bit of time, the thieves might still be nearby."

Eru might not be able to see him, but a ferocious smile returned to Molten's face, just like a hunter going after a prey. Hymerwort turned to the surviving Karrdator and ordered:

"You heard him, I will be going after the thieves that had ran off, but we can't leave the heavily damaged fort alone. I order you all to stay behind to defend."

The red rabbit knights which has three platoon at full strength had only 20% of its combat forces left. Destroying the enemy was as good as dwindling their own forces, that was the terrible part of the invader's scheme. Even if they deployed the few damaged Karrdator here, it will only make them uneasy. Hence, they should be left to defend the fort, while the strongest machine that was almost undamaged, Hymerwort, pursued. They had no time to hesitate.

"Alright, Ernesti, as you can see, we are short handed. I would like to request you and your weird armor to lead the way and assist me."

"Definitely. Be it leading the way or assisting you, I will do all I can."

They left this place to the Karrdator who saluted them. Hymerwort and Motor Beat dashed out to the road gallantly.

The metallic clashes in the distance stopped.

Dietrich felt complicated with half uneasiness and half expectation, raising his eyebrow. He pressed on to the pedal harder, increasing Guyale's pace. He raced on, the surroundings illuminated solely by moonlight, not decreasing his almost suicidal speed. The footfalls of the iron giant mixed with the scraping of metal on metal. Looking carefully, the crimson armor on it was twisted all over. With every step it took, some parts of the armor was even creating sparks from the friction.

Guyale was tangled up with Tellestarle before entering the forest, which stalled him. Dietrich was so angry that he fired his back weapon despite the damage to his own machine, regaining freedom for a short time.

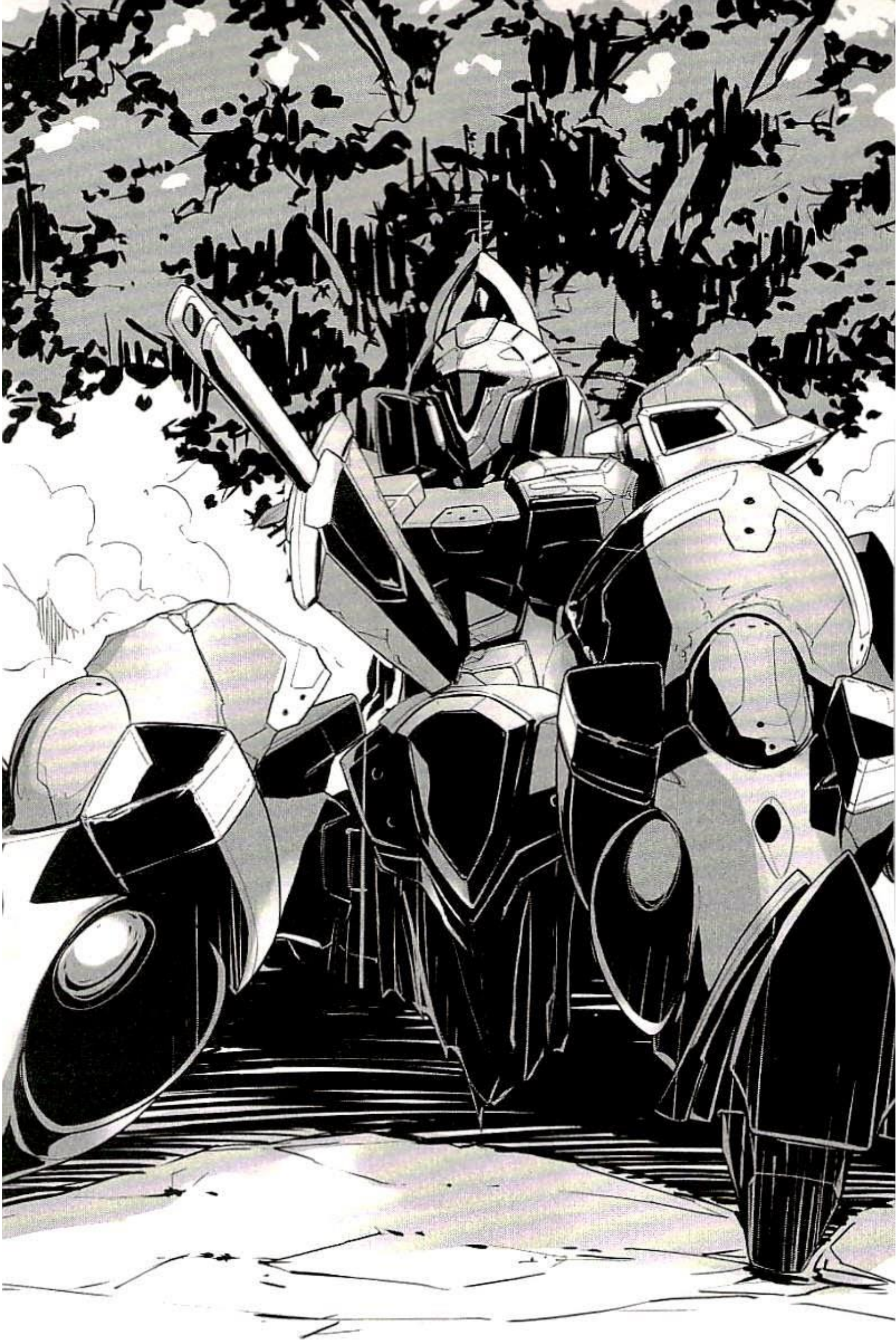
But the thing that stumped him was the half destroyed Tellestarle refusing to release Guyale's leg. That fearless determination took Guyale a lot of effort to break out of. The damage was minimal, but Dietrich felt the other party got his way when he thought about the time he wasted.

He finally subdued the Tellestarle completely in the end. Dietrich then chased after the escaping Tellestarle and Earlecumber who was following them. Acquart forest was filled with signs of violent battles and movement of Silhouette knights, so it was easy to track. He focused on hurrying on.

As he ran, Guyale suddenly came to an empty plot of land. No, the place wasn't this bare originally. The signs of slashes on the trees and things falling all over showed that an intense battle happened here. Dietrich shook off the ominous feeling creeping on his back and surveyed the area. The surrounding was filled with dark trees with wild grass growing beneath. He looked around him and found something pure white that didn't fit in with the forest. The pure white here could only be one thing.

"Edgar! I have been looking for you, where is the Telle..."

As he approached the white object, Dietrich's voice became smaller. He recognized the giant resting against the tree-- the Silhouette Knight Earlecumber and gasped.



The white and flawless armor was twisted from an intense battle, the color turning dim and dull. It was probably slashed at the shoulder, the entire right arm was missing, even the chest armor nearby was peeled off. The lifelessly dangling left arm had a shield attached, which was covered with scars of explosion and slashes, it was still swinging slightly. There was slight damage, but the legs were in good condition. That was the proof that Earlecumber fought till the very end.

At the same time, the sword that pinned Earlecumber to the tree by the stomach announced its defeat clearer than a thousand words. They probably struck at the same time. An arm severed at the elbow was still holding the sword sticking through Earlecumber's stomach, and seemed to belong to a Tellestarle. Listening carefully, a churning noise could be heard from within the machine. The ether reactor wasn't functional, but it was still running.

Earlecumber remained motionless. Dietrich who couldn't hold back his frustration ran towards it.

"...!? Edgar!! Hey, answer me! Are you alright!?"

An indescribable feeling filled Dietrich's heart. The damage to the Silhouette knight was not indicative of injury the pilot incurred. But because the Silhouette knight was humanoid in shape, people tend to assume the pilot suffered similar injuries. Reacting to Dietrich's shouts, Earlecumber moved its neck slowly, as if it was rusted. Half of the armor covering the head had been squashed, the unsteady gaze looked over from the crystal eye.

"... Ugh, is it Di? Sorry, I let the Tellestarle get away..."

"Ah, I see. But are you okay!? Hang on, I will send you to the fort..."

Dietrich relaxed and suggested, but was interrupted by Edgar's loud voice.

"Di! Earlecumber's reactor is shot and it can't move, but it won't blow up any time soon. Aside from some bruises from the crash, I am fine. More importantly, it hadn't been long, go chase Tellestarle...!!"

Dietrich was caught in a dilemma. Was it fine to abandon the seriously damaged Earlecumber and go after Tellestarle? Edgar said he was fine, but there was no guarantee that was true. Seeing his rival and friend who competed with him in the pilot faculty all this time in a bind made Dietrich hesitate about chasing Tellestarle. No, he was hesitating about leaving this place.

"Di, we got this far, don't let him slip away, I'm counting on you!"

"... Alright, leave it to me!!"

The thing that made up his mind was the words of his friend. Dietrich could feel the strong determination within Edgar's words, and swept his doubts away. He couldn't ignore the will that pushed Earlecumber to fight on until it broke down. Dietrich's friend had not given up the fight. Guyale nodded firmly, turned around and chased Tellestarle, charging into the forest.

Hearing the footsteps of Guyale grow distant, Edgar managed to squeeze a smile from his bitter expression. He could no longer see the twisted image displayed on the holo monitor. As he listened to the fading footfall, he imagined the scene of someone running off.

"I'm counting on you, Di. I am going to rest for a while..."

Edgar breath out, holding back his moan and slowly relaxing his body. He didn't even have the strength to wipe the red liquid dripping from his forehead and submerged into the darkness once again.

The crimson Silhouette knight morphed into a whirlwind, sprinting in the forest. Dietrich used his anger to suppress the anxiety welling in his chest, pushing his machine to go forth. Guyale had already drawn both its swords and deployed its back weapon, ready to fight. The moment he finds Tellestarle, Dietrich's blade smothering from wrath would joyously send a final notice to the enemy.

As he ran, Dietrich could tell from the tracks in the forest that the Tellestarle was in terrible condition. Earlecumber dealt serious damage to Tellestarle as expected, and Guyale's mission was to attack the enemy and deal the final blow.

"It couldn't have gone too far with such damage...! Where is it!?"

After running for quite some time, Dietrich noticed something from the senses he honed through his many battles. In the tracks in front of him, something was squirming in the darkness.

"That is... No, it's not Tellestarle!?"

His instinct told him the enemy he was looking for wasn't in front of him. He felt there were 'numerous' beings. Those things seemed to notice that Guyale was approaching, and crawled out from the fog of darkness with a roar.

The true identity of these things were demon beasts.

From their size, they were definitely duel level, and it was a 'swarm' in numbers. The track of Tellestarle vanished in the middle of this group.

"What... what is happening!?"

The tracks had been trampled by the squirming demon beast and difficult to identify. He was just one step away from victory, and was stopped by an unexpected ambush.

Dietrich was furious, and had the illusion of everything before him turning red. His emotion reached the boiling point and he didn't notice how unnatural this situation was.

Before him was a swarm of demon beast from a 'mixture of species'. Demon beast was just a general term and consisted of multiple types. It was normally impossible to mobilize them together, as they have the concept of territory and nests. In other words, the swarm that was blocking his way was a 'unnatural occurrence'.

Several of them lowered their stance and growled at Guyale. They weren't just gathered together, each one of them were highly agitated. There were some that bared their teeth at each other, trying to impose dominance over each other.

In such a situation, what would happen if a giant emitting an aura of fury was to approach? The demon beasts were sensitive to changes. Using their instincts, the beast judged the giant that was standing still from anger and confusion to be an enemy and charged with crazed vigor.

Dietrich felt regret over showing this fatal opening as he took a stance against the demon beast charging over. He had calmed down slightly after losing his cool earlier. The remnant of calmness in his mind grasped the situation, directing his wrath into the will to attack, allowing Guyale to display an even more powerful ability. A mighty slash decapitated a flame tiger, while the shot from 'Kamtha' killed another.

As he fought the demon beast, Dietrich realized 'something' and frowned. His original goal was to pursue the escaping Tellestarle, he didn't have time to deal with so many demon beast. His only hope which was the tracks left behind had already been trampled over. Even if he could break through this swarm, it would be impossible to catch up. What about going around this swarm? But with so many demon beast

congregating, their active area would be large too. How far would he need to detour in order to avoid detection? Just thinking about it made him feel it was foolish. Even if he avoided battle with the demon beast, he will lose the only clue helping him track the enemy down. Dietrich wasn't optimistic about his chances of finding his target by wandering around the forest.

Did I lose him? The thought flashed across Dietrich's heart, and he was aware of something uneasy pricking at his heart. He cursed the 'coincidence' of the demon beasts blocking his path.

No matter how angry Dietrich was, he wouldn't do something as dumb as charging into the midst of the swarm of demon beasts. But the situation developed by itself. As Dietrich stood his ground, the scent of blood from the demon beast he killed spread out towards the other demon beast, agitating them further, drawing them towards the source of the scent.

And the source of the bloody smell stemmed from the crimson knight. Watching the demon beast flooding out of the forest one after another, Dietrich couldn't help groaning a curse. Despite his anger, he moved Guyale back. But this action was too late and he didn't have much choice. Dietrich couldn't shake off the blunt bear and flame tiger no matter what he did. Dietrich needed to find a place to fight, but there were too many demon beasts. If they gang up on him, even the new Guyale would be in danger. As Dietrich retreated, he cautiously gauged the opportune time to attack.

The demon beast running on four legs were naturally faster than Guyale, and entered attack range. As it was about to pounce from behind, the Guyale stopped in its track and slashed behind him like a whirlwind. The endless power of the new model raised this attack into a fatal blow. Ignoring the flame tiger it defeated in mid-air, Guyale fired its 'Kamtha' to keep the others at bay. As the demon beast collided together and fell into confusion, Guyale retreated once again to buy time.

But a strong force tugged onto its hand, making it stop. A blunt dragon was biting on to Guyale's left hand. This type of demon beast was strong, a normal Silhouette knight wouldn't be able to match. Guyale didn't lose in terms of strength, but he was forced to stay in this position, a grave mistake. Meanwhile, the demon beast picked themselves up and drew closer. Dietrich moaned hysterically like he used to, thinking about how many he could take out before with his Silhouette arms before they come closer. Instead of resignation, his sigh contained the ferocious will to fight.

Suddenly, numerous objects flew over the top of Guyale's head with a screech..

Instead of precision, the giant arrows that relied more on numbers flew in one after another, sticking into the faces and legs of the demon beasts. Seeing several demon beast fall in pain, Dietrich used the chance to cut off the blunt dragon's head. Guyale who regained its freedom from the crisis, used the chance to look at the armor on the trees, there were two Silhouette gear there. From what he remembered, there were only three people who could control Silhouette gear proficiently, and two of them journeyed with him.

"Di Senpai! We will cover you, so please fall back a little!!"

"Why are there so many demon beasts!? Ah- annoying!"

The two of them-- the twins Chid and Ady didn't hide their displeasure of the sight of the swarm of demon beast, aiming their mobile ballistas and firing off a barrage. The demon beast who was hit in the head roared and fell in pain, and the swarm scattered. Dietrich finally obtained a break in the action which was more valuable than gold, but--

"Ah-- Di Senpai, sorry, that barrage used up all the arrows. Let's use this chance to flee."

"...It's enough, thanks for the big help. You guys go first."

Right now, the twins who strutted their stuff during the battle with Tellestarle had limited supplies left, and it was depleted in the last burst of fire. Dietrich took a slow deep breath. The covering fire from his junior cooled his overheated emotions down, allowing him to look at the big picture. Guyale was wary about retreating too hastily, but Chid thought Dietrich wasn't fast enough.

"They will catch up if you don't hurry up!"

"Yes, I think so too. But Edgar is still behind us, and he might get dragged in if we let them draw too close. Seems like we have to defeat these guys before that happens."

"Edgar Senpai!? We can't let that happen! We will help too!!"

The twins were full of spirits, but they were down to the two handed sword in their hands right now. Chid's MB was even missing its anchor wire. Even with their help, it wasn't enough against the swarm of demon beast.

"You have exhausted your arrows right? Thanks to you, the demon beasts had scattered. I will figure this out myself."

Dietrich gave an exceedingly calm reply. There was no hint of anxiety or anger in his tone. They couldn't escape easily, these demon beast are obstacles blocking his pursuit anyway. Since there were no choice but to fight, there was no need to be troubled over this. This made Dietrich felt more at ease.

"So bring Edgar along with you and leave. This is nothing, leave it to me..."

"Then let me accompany you in their place."

Before the grumpy faced twins could say anything, someone replied from an unexpected direction. Immediately after that, the one replying leapt over their heads and showed himself. A familiar blue figure faced the swarm of demon beast with no hesitation. When Dietrich knew who it was, the worries in his mind vanished. As he suppressed his smile, Chid and Ady cheered and high fived each other.

The person who flew in from behind them-- Ernesti who was piloting a blue Silhouette gear, smiled audaciously as he watched the swarm of demon beasts close in.

"Could you explain the situation? The prey... cough, the Tellestale, where is it? These prey... cough cough, what is with this swarm of demon beast?"

In Dietrich's eye, that demeanor of being overly enthusiastic overlapped with his past memories. This boy could even fight a hopelessly big demon beast joyfully. Eru would definitely kick up a storm here, demon beasts of this level was no match for him. Dietrich smiled bitterly.

"I ran into this swarm as I was chasing after Tellestarle. Its tracks goes right through the swarm... but it had been trampled over, it is impossible to trace. I don't know why there are demon beasts at such a place. These things trampled over Tellestarle's track and make me so mad. And Edgar is down, resting somewhere behind us. I am thinking about stopping them right here."

"I see, that means we should dispose of them first right?"

"Ahh, yeah, let's do that. Please give it your all, just like that time with the behemoth."

"I understand."

The blue Silhouette gear disregarded the heavy pressure from the demon beast and jumped right into the middle of the swarm. Compared to the Silhouette gear, duel level demon beast were much larger, and the swarm of them were coming like a tsunami. The small armor looked helpless before the tide washing in.

But before that happened, the sound of an explosion overlapped with the sound of footsteps, and the Motor Beat accelerated. It charged into the gap between the demon beast with the speed of a bullet, covered by the glow of magic as it passed by. The flame bullets which materialized hit the face of the demon beasts, making the demon beast squirm painfully from their burned nose and rampage. The swarm fell into a vicious cycle of chaos in no time.

Even though he had no time to spare, Dietrich had the urge to facepalm himself. He knew Eru would do something like that, and Eru didn't disappoint and made a huge scene. Dietrich noticed something. The Motor Beat was causing disarray among the demon beast, but that's the limit of what it could do. It didn't possess the attack power capable of taking down duel level demon beast after all.

Guyale aimed its back weapon and raised both its swords. If that was so, his duty was to deliver the final blow. He couldn't let this golden opportunity go. A few demon beast who broke out of the chaos charged at the crimson knight. As Dietrich prepared to engage, a burst of wind dashed from his side.

“Waaarrghhhh!!”

A lump of metal smashed into the body of a demon beast with a feral roar. This wasn't just strength, it was also weight and speed that turned the demon beast into minced meat, and sent it right back into the forest.

Ignoring the wide eyed Dietrich, Hymerwort raised its hammer and repeated the same procedure and crushed the incoming demon beast, sending it to meet its comrade.

“Hmmm, I heard the pilot of the new model in pursuit is a cadet, but I didn't imagine you would not give an inch even in the face of this swarm of demon beast! Impressive guts. Allow me to help you!”

As Hymerwort chatted, it continued to turn one demon beast after another into mush. Even though it wasn't a new model, the tough armor of Hymerwort performed fantastically in this chaotic battle. As it was a heavy model, its power was on par with the new model and swept the demon beast away with ease. With the appearance of strong allies, Guyale didn't just stand there. Using the typhoon created by Hymerwort as a shield, it acted like a guerrilla, taking down the demon beast one at a time.

There were a few dozen demon beast in this swarm, a far larger scale than the one which attacked Dallier village. But the group didn't pay this any heed as Eru, Chid and Ady created havoc with their Silhouette gear, separating the beast into smaller groups for Hymerwort and Guyale to finish off. Even if they were on a roll, it still took a lot of time to exterminate such a large number of demon beast. When the battle was over, the sky to the east had started turning white.

Eru opened the armor in Motor Beat and surveyed the area. The forest which was the battlefield was a terrible sight. Trees that were broken and fallen, barren grounds and the carcasses of gigantic beast. Hymerwort and Guyale who had taken down numerous demon beast was battered as the machines were pushed to the limit.

“... Let's return to the fort.”

Eru calmly announced the end of the fight to Guyale who was still ready for combat.

“... It's no good?”

“Even if you want to pursue, it will be too late. And look at this terrible scene, there is no way to tell which direction the thief fled in. We accumulated too much fatigue too, it is impossible even if we try.”

“It’s a pity, but let’s call for aid from somewhere else...”

In response to Dietrich’s request, Eru shook his head.

“Fort Casadesus is in a terrible state, there is no telling when they can muster the manpower. And with how well they executed the attack, I don’t think the thief would simply run. If they use decoys or disguises, it would be hard to track. We could try asking for aid, but there is no guarantee...”

After hearing him say that, Dietrich forced his stiff hand to release the control stick and pull it back. Guyale’s back weapon screeched painfully as it retracted. The crimson knight kept the swords in its hands and walked slowly towards the fort.

After the tense and chaotic night, the day was breaking. The sunlight scattered the darkness in the forest, revealing the trace of destruction left in Acquart forest. Those involved in the incident were dead tired, and their reward was the damaged fortress and numerous sacrifices. The few surviving Karrdator pushed their tired body to perform their duties. Fortunately, the fort was built from stone, so the fire didn’t spread to the inside, allowing Fort Casadesus which caught fire at one point to remain operational. But its combat force was almost wiped out, with both manpower and Silhouette knights pushed to the brink.

Duke Knut Dixgard seated in the Top Level War Room, a few wrinkles added to his aged but sharp expression. Because of this incident that happened throughout the night, most of the people in Fort Casadesus stayed up the entire night. For the duke who was between middle and advanced age, working through the night was a heavy burden. But his appearance and voice showed no sign of weakness.

“Including the gates, the fort lost 20% of its facilities. We suffered serious casualties, but the pressing problem are the Silhouette knights being just one step away from being wiped out.”

Summarizing the report submitted to him, Knut couldn’t help sighing after confirming the losses suffered by the fort. The fort was in danger of falling after just one night.

... Thieves. I don’t know who their allegiance is to, but damn... but we were careless too...

From what Knut knew, Fremmevira Kingdom had never suffered attacks from Silhouette knights for the past century. Aside from there being nothing to gain from this, the natural barrier of Aubigne mountain made it difficult for other countries to attack.

Political wise, the kingdom was stable and there were no signs of revolt, allowing all the territory to invest in anti-demon beast defence. In this incident, the lack of experience was a serious flaw leading to self-destruction. The schemes of men were more terrifying than demon beasts sometimes. Compared to the lesson learnt, the price they had to pay was heavy.

Molten knocked and entered the room. After saluting in silence, he skipped the opening greeting and got straight to the point:

“Pardon me Sir. Regarding the new models... out of the five that was taken, four had been recovered, but one of them shook off our pursuit and we lost track of it.”

“... It escaped?”

“During our pursuit, the Laihiala cadets joined in because of various reasons... But something strange happened along the way.”

Knut told him to go on with his gaze.

“Demon beasts. Because of a swarm of demon beast appearing along the escape route of the thief, we had to give up on the pursuit.”

Another frown was added to Knut’s face. It’s nothing special for demon beast to appear, but the timing of it showing up was too coincidental, and blocked the advance of the pursuing party? The demon beasts might move as they please, but that was normally part of their usual routine. Knut could sniff the scent of someone having a hand in this.

“I thought it was suspicious and investigated thoroughly...”

Molten’s face which was known for being courageous had something bitter mixed in, including despise, anger and contempt. He said in a tone full of disdain:

“In the place where the demon beast showed up... I found remnants of a ‘curse bait’.”

In that instant, Knut who was quietly thinking about the content of the report opened his eyes wide from shock and anger. ‘Curse bait’ was a lure made from special medicine made for the purpose of attracting demon beasts. It works by emitting scent which demon beast like, able to gather the demon beasts nearby when used. But the demon beast that congregated would be agitated and become more aggressive.

Hearing this, Knut stood up, knocking his chair back.

“Preposterous... curse bait!? It was used merely to ‘escape’!? Are they insane!! If that is true... No, as expected...”

The consequences of using that in Fremmevira kingdom was clear. It would create an epidemic of demon beast in the region, and was a great taboo in Fremmevira kingdom. Its production method was obviously heavily classified. Not just production, even possession could be punishable by death. Aside from legal issues, it was not acceptable rationally and emotionally by the masses. With the demon beasts periodic attacks, both the knights and civilians had to fight day and night in this nation. Doing something here would naturally be infuriating to the people, which exposed the origin of the thieves.

“I am thinking, could the thieves be from another nation...”

Knut nodded, he was thinking the same things as Molten. Setting the issue with the curse bait aside, he couldn’t think of any reason anyone within the kingdom would plot this incident. Knut had been considering this possibility for a long time, and this new clue became the last piece of the puzzle. He pondered for a moment. This incident had serious implications, he need to tidy up the situation and clear all his doubts.

“... Molten, do what you can to gather information in the vicinity. There is no need to rush with the restoration of the fort. I have to report to his majesty myself... I will be rushing to Känkänen. Prepare the carriage!”

躺在病房床上的艾德加繃起臉，開口說道：

「……海薇，我有件事
必須先告訴你。」



Chapter 18 - When the silver phoenix spread its wings

The season moved into deep autumn in a blink of an eye, the chill in the air grew stronger with each passing day. The bone chilling breeze was blowing today too, only the bright and cheery sunlight from the clear skies delayed the onset of winter.

This was an infirmary situated within Laihiala pilot academy. On the only bed within the room, Edgar slowly opened his eyes. This was a clean and bare room. The sunlight shining in at an angle pierced through the lacy curtain and into the room, giving his cheeks some warmth, gently stimulating his slightly opened eyes. He had slept for quite a long time, so he couldn't concentrate immediately and his sight lacked focus. His view was covered by a white fog before everything gradually became clear. At the same time, Edgar recalled the situation before he lost conscious, and struggled to get up in confusion.

“Ugh...”

Aches from all over his body were registered by his brain, stemming off Edgar's thought of getting up. Within his confused mind, Edgar compared his current situation with what he last remembered. These were injuries from an intense collision and bruises from machine parts sent flying. His life wasn't in danger, but it wasn't just a light wound. he relaxed after judging so and rested his body onto the bed.

The pain prevented him from sleeping, so he just laid there in silence. At this moment, he heard a cautious knock on the door. Edgar attempted to answer, but the dryness of his throat deprived him of his voice. He managed to grunt, but the door opened before he sounded out.

“...! You are awake!”

The woman who entered -- Helvi stared with eyes wide open, jogging to the bed Edgar was lying on. In her hands was a jug of water.

“Great... You have been sleeping for three days, I was so worried.”

Teardrops were glistening at the corner of her eyes. Edgar was surprised by the words ‘three days’. He wanted to express his apology and gratitude, but only a hoarse sound came out of his mouth. Helvi who noticed this slowly slotted a straw into Edgar's mouth, with the other end inside the jug. After moisturizing his throat, Edgar relaxed and asked with his hoarse voice:

“... Sorry Helvi. After that... After I lost conscious, what happened...?”

Even at this juncture, Edgar was still so serious. Helvi shrugged and pulled a chair over to sit.

“Alright, I will explain everything to you. There is time, so don't be hasty.”

After taking a sip herself, Helvi tilted her head and said:

“Well, first of all...”

The imperial capital of Fremmevira, Känkänen. In Castle Shreiber situated at its heart, there were several figures along the corridors to the audience hall of the palace.

One of them was the king of Fremmevira Ambrosius Tahvo Fremmevira. An elderly reigning head of state, he was once a knight in his youth, and had experience as a field commander. He had carried on with his training since those days and was strong and healthy. His majestic hair and beard was like a lion's mane, his presence was as strong as before, permeating into the surrounding. A few steps behind him was duke Knut Dixgard. Compared to the king, he was slender and gave the impression of a sharp blade. But right now, his face was shrouded in fatigue and anxiety, dulling his usual glint.

"So, robbers broke into Fort Casadesus through schemes and took the new models of Silhouette knight by force, is that right?"

"Yes. We have recovered most of the new model Silhouette knights, but one of them got away. We have put up notice everywhere and are combing the grounds, but nothing had turned up so far. It was my grave negligence, I have no words to defend myself. I am prepared to bear any punishment..."

"Knut, don't be hasty. Instead of punishing you, I have more important things for you to do. If you want to take responsibility, put more effort into your work in the future and think about how to make up for it."

With how serious Knut was, if the two of them weren't walking, he would have already prostrated himself on the spot. But facing Knut's confession, Ambrosius waved and dismissed it.

"You strongly suspect the real identity of the robbers... to be personnel from foreign nations?"

"Yes, I believe it to be so. We are interrogating the robbers we captured for intelligence. But they appear to have special training and are keeping their mouth shut. It will take some time to identify their true identity."

"No matter what, we won't need to be hasty as long as the robbers stay within our borders. It's just a matter of time before we get them. Otherwise, their escape route would be limited to the Bocuse sea of trees or hiking up the mountain range. It is easy to deduce where they will go."

'Bocuse sea of trees'. This forest was situated to the east of Fremmevira, and a realm that played host to countless demon beasts. The recent attack of the behemoth was still fresh in everyone's mind, there might be demon beast stronger than that out there. Judging from that, it was easy to imagine how foolish it would be to seek refuge there.

On the other hand, the west of Fremmevira was populated by nations of humans -- 'western countries'. Going that way would require hiking up mount Aubigne. The mountain range had always been known for its treacherous terrain, but it wasn't impassable. There were several easy passages built into roads, with garrisons set up.

The problem was the alternate routes through the mountains. It might be difficult for regular travel, but it was possible to traverse through it, and the robbers might have prearranged such a route. There were no radars in this world. The surveillance effort of the mountains wasn't just for show, but there were gaps in the security which Ambrosius was aware of.

"Really, things are getting serious. It has been a long time since we had diplomatic talks with foreign nations."

The reason why the kingdom could survive with its national borders in such a battered state, was because of its geographical location. Situated between the Bocuse sea of trees and Aubigne mountain range, Fremmevira could be described as a 'city wall'. For the western countries, the existence of this kingdom was convenient and beneficial to them, solving problematic issues which would have troubled them otherwise. That was why they wouldn't do unnecessary things and risk souring this relationship. The nations came to a similar consensus to not intervene in anyway, and have a 'turn a blind eye' historical background with Fremmevira. That was the main reason why the kingdom was relaxed in their security against the other nations.

“The next generation model of Silhouette knights was stolen. Once this has been made opened to the world, it would be impossible to keep it from spreading to other nations. It’s too late to worry about that. We have to defend our mean of survival.”

In order to carve a path into the future. Both men were thinking about the same thing.

The audience hall of castle Shreiber was spacious. This was natural as it was built to host Silhouette knight within it. When a ceremony was held here, tidy rows of Silhouette knight would line up at the side, displaying the majesty of the kingdom.

Right now, the group inside the hall weren’t Silhouette knights, but a group of young adults. Simply put, they were the students from the pilot faculty of Laihiala academy, and three children. After resolving the incident in Fort Casadesus, the ones staying in Laihiala had also been summoned, gathering almost all of the students in the pilot faculty.

The students stayed in this spacious hall, awed by the serious atmosphere as they waited for the imminent arrival of the king.

“Good, you may rise.”

Ambrosius looked at group kneeling before him and did away with the pleasantries with a casual tone. He then sat onto the throne gracefully. The Laihiala students lifted their heads, but they were so nervous that their body grew stiff. This was natural since they were already tense in the presence of a Duke. A petite boy stood at the center of the front row and seemed indifferent. Ambrosius smiled the moment he glanced at Ernesti. The next instance, his face turned serious, and said with a voice filled with dignity.

“First of all, I must congratulate all the students present for successfully developing a new machine model, well done. For a group still schooling to accomplish an unheard of achievement, I feel proud and happy.”

Ambrosius’ words made most of the student blush from excitement. Some of them even looked shocked.

“Regrettably, there are ruffians disrupting this great work. We have done all we could to capture them, but there has not been any news yet. We have prepared for the worse and assume the ruffians had escaped.”

The expressions of the students turned gloomy. They were overjoyed by the praises of his majesty, but the cold reality pulled them back to earth.

“There is no need to be upset. They might have stolen one machine, but that doesn’t mean they have taken everything related to the new model from us. But with the news of this machine made public, there will be conflict between nations over this new model. When that happens, we can’t afford to fall behind! From what I know, the new model had yet to be perfected. The reason I have summoned everyone here is to make it so. Without further ado, Ernesti. What do you need to perfect the new models?”

Eru thought for a moment after hearing the king’s question and asked.

“There are two problems, one of them would take quite a while no matter what. The other problem... requires the assistance of NTR Lab.”

Eru’s answer differed wildly from the guesses of most of the people present. They thought that Eru himself, or Eru and the students would complete the new model’s development. Ambrosius just wanted to know what he would need in order to accomplish that. But Eru’s answer wasn’t facilities or materials, but the name of an organization.

“There are many issues that need to be resolved for the new models, one of which is ease of control. NTR Lab is experienced in this aspect, I think it would be most efficient to borrow their expertise. Also, if we are planning to adopt the new model as the base unit for Silhouette knights, production method would be very important from here on. Hence, the best way is to use the Karrdator which is the most populous model as a springboard and upgrade them. To achieve this, it would be best to rope in NTR Lab who are most familiar with Karrdators.”

Eru had prepared these answers beforehand and presented everything fluently. In contrast, Ambrosius was a little disappointed and crossed his arms .

“So you are saying that future development should be transferred to NTR Lab?”

“I know this alone won’t solve the problem. We have to explain the details carefully to NTR Lab. But there is already progress for that. Thanks to the recommendation of Duke Dixgard, all my senpai present would definitely have a place in NTR Lab. Everyone of them is a member who took part in the research and development of Tellestarle from the beginning to the end, they will definitely see the new model into completion.”

Ambrosius squinted his eyes and stroked his beard. This boy had given much thought. As Ambrosius thought about this, something seemed to be out of place. His instinct told him he had missed something. In order to recall what that was, his eyes fell on the boy once again, and he got his answer.

“Yes, you have a point. As you have suggested, I will summon NTR Lab to discuss this. For the completion of the new model, I am looking forward to your performance from now on... But, why wasn’t your name mentioned in your proposal earlier?”

“Yes your majesty. I will be in the second year of middle school soon, I won’t be graduating so soon.”

At this moment the two thoughts of ‘Why are you bringing this up this late in the game’ and ‘Oh, that’s right’ flashed through the minds of everyone present. Even Ambrosius couldn’t conceal the surprise on his face.

“... As the king, it might be inappropriate for me to say this. But at this point, do you even need to study in school?”

When they heard this, Chid and Ady who were behind Eru trembled. If the king ordered Eru to stop schooling, they wouldn’t have any way of stopping that from happening. The words that made them rush to Casadesus swelled towards their throat, but wouldn’t come out. The two of them could only hang their heads with their fist clenched and listen quietly.

The two of them didn’t noticed that Eru glanced backwards at them.

“There is... a reason. Your majesty, the reason I could work on the ‘new model’ project and finish it, was because of extremely good luck.”

Whenever the petite Eru spoke to Ambrosius, he had to look upwards. Ambrosius could see the shining determination in the boy’s eyes staring straight at him. He smiled and replied:

“Oh, so you mean this incredible achievement wasn’t because of your own talent, but simply great luck?”

“As you know, I am just twelve years old. No matter what ideas or methods I could think of, if there is no one to acknowledge it, I wouldn’t have any accomplishment. This achievement was thanks to the senpais in the pilot faculty not treating my words as a joke, and treated it seriously. I don’t think there are many who would do the same for me.”

“Your work is outstanding, I can’t just dismiss it so simply. And if I were to give the order, I don’t think NTR Lab would ignore my words. If that was the case, wouldn’t the condition be similar?”

Eru lowered his gaze and shook his head slowly.

“That would cause unnecessary friction. The new model will become the center of attention and would require long hours to research and develop. If unnecessary elements are mixed in, things that could have been done might become impossible.”

These words were right on the mark on what Ambrosius was worried about. The National Technological Robotics Laboratory was set up right after the founding of Fremmevira kingdom. The organization’s long years of research supported the development of all technology related to Silhouette knights. The researchers were exceptionally talented and had a high level of pride. The pride of men was a troublesome thing, no matter how talented one was or what his accomplishment was, it doesn’t mean the Lab could accommodate him. Especially with such a huge age gap, the problem of sending Eru there was obvious.

With Eru’s talent and his matured way of handling things, such minor issues wouldn’t set him back, that was how Ambrosius felt. He also thought the friction could be reduced by giving some ‘insurance’ to the students. After considering the potential problems, forcibly assigning Eru into NTR lab had more cons than pros. And as Eru said, at the end of the day, it would be hard to say if the task could be finished in NTR lab.

For the ‘final adjustment’, it would be impossible to accomplish without NTR Lab’s expertise. And the finished product would be presented to the world by NTR Lab, which would preserve their pride, a great way of resolving the problem. Except for one thing. Ambrosius thought about that one thing and frowned deeply. Seeing Ambrosius’ troubled face, Eru smiled immediately.

“Please be at ease, I have not forgotten about the promise I made with your majesty. I would not give up on my goal to make the best Silhouette knight ever. Hence... I will complete the next machine design before I graduate, please look forward to it.”

“... Wait, you are still doing that?”

Everyone in the hall heard the illusionary sound of people falling down like dominoes. Some of those present were literally holding their head with a bitter smile.

“As the saying goes, slow and steady wins the race. This time, I will plan carefully and design a unique and perfect design!”

“No, that’s not the problem here!”

Knut who was standing by at the side scratched his forehead and mumbled: “...He is talking about that...”. Ambrosius glanced at him and suppressed his urge to laugh.

“The completion of the new model is important... But doesn’t everyone want to design newer machines?”

Eru looked as if he was being willful, but everyone understood-- This guy was just leaving the problematic finishing touch to the others. Ambrosius couldn’t bear it any longer. Being with this boy made Ambrosius feel like he was reverting to his old self. His blood of a prankster was squirming.

“I see, as expected of a hobbyist. The NTR Lab would be motivated by a project on such a grand scale. Their expertise is guaranteed, they will definitely produce great results.”

Ambrosius laughed for a while and reverted to his serious expression.

“Is this fine? I might tap into their expertise when making the next model too alright?”

“The development of Tellestarle was just an experiment. Thanks to that, I learned all sorts of knowledge and gain much experience. The end product has the potential to be the basis for future development. But the mass production model Fremmevira seeks is one that is flawless and has multi utility. But the machines I am planning to design doesn't match these two criteria.”

Ambrosius ignored Knut who stood stunned in place. The boy who rewrote the development history of Silhouette knights because of his 'hobby' was taking it to the 'next phase'. Ambrosius was concerned because of his curiosity and the impact of Eru's actions. Eru made history with just a 'test', what should be Ambrosius' focus for the 'next phase', the completion of the mass produced models or...?

And moving on to the 'next phase' would be dependent on this boy. NTR Lab might be a capable organization, but they could not provide such a dramatic technological leap. Just from this point, it was clear what the answer should be. The problem was how to do so. Suddenly, inspiration struck Ambrosius like a comet. Ambrosius sat up, with a scheme in mind.

“I can agree with your reasoning, but I cannot approve of this.”

Knut saw from Ambrosius' profile the nightmare that haunted him in the past.

“I cannot allow you to do as you please as a student. There is no need to wait for the construction of the next machine model, get it done as soon as you can and show it to me.”

Only Eru could hear the faint sigh that came from behind him. Even though Eru couldn't do anything about it, he couldn't trample the willful wishes of his childhood friends like this. As Eru was thinking of a scheme under the guise of his innocent face, Ambrosius continued:

“By the way Knut, since Ernesti expressed his interest in Silhouette knight creation, his safety will be a concern.”

“Yes, your majesty.”

“My safety? What is the problem?”

“Let's see. The villains targeted the 'actual product' this time, but if something like this happens again, there is no telling whether the source of this whole incident -- you, would be in danger. You might develop another new machine. If they keep targeting generations after generations of machines, the enemies would feel that there is no end to this and take drastic actions. That's why we have to ensure your personal safety.”

“We should assign him some guards.”

“That means what you need would be blacksmiths to bring life to your ideas, and knights who can protect your life.”

Ambrosius relaxed his serious face which seemed to be a farce, and smiled without worries.

“And these people must accommodate you without a hint of prejudice. Do you have any idea who could fulfill these conditions, Ernesti? Well? The answer is obvious, there's nothing to consider.”

For a short moment, Ernesti Echevarria stood wide eyed on the spot in surprise. He moved moments later, turning to look behind him. As expected, all the students in Laihiala pilot faculty focused their gaze on him. Even Dietrich and David were looking at him with warm eyes. The silence that contained a multitude of emotion fell between them.

“That’s right. The students of Laihiala. Everyone has experience in making the new model. I am looking forward to your performance once again. I hereby order the raising of a new Order of Knights. The members include Ernesti, and the ones who craft and pilot the Silhouette knights alongside you!”

“An order of knights... Us?”

Eru who was always smiling could feel the corners of his mouth cramping. In contrast the smile on Ambrosius’ face was getting deeper.

“Since the Order of Knights has been raised, we have to name it. The scale isn’t big, so we shouldn’t assign it the colour blue? No, because of your duties, it should be a different category. Oh, the familiar ‘silver’ is a good fit. Am I right, Ernesti? Next, I will bestow everyone with the name of ‘Phoenix’. The ‘Silver Phoenix Knights’, that would be the title all of you will go by.”

This name spread out like a ripple with the mumbling of everyone present. Moments later, it had permeated into the minds of everyone present-- the ‘former’ students of Laihiala pilot faculty and Ernesti’s group .

“Ah, this is a Knight Order, but it would take time to prepare a suitable place to set up base. There is a need for a temporary base in the meantime. Knut, is there anywhere that is suitable?”

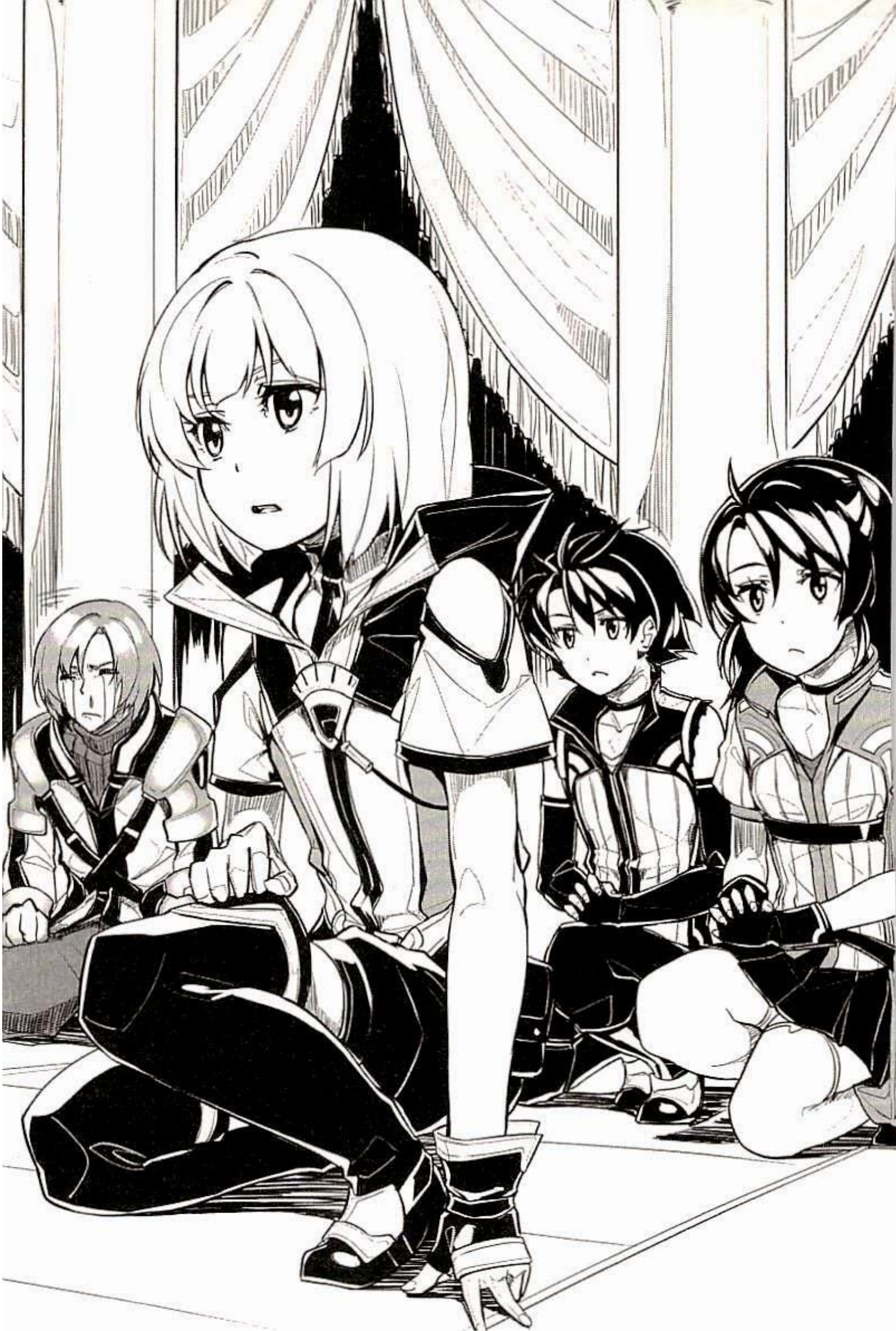
“Yes. Everyone here is related to Laihiala pilot academy. Since most of them are students, how about housing them on campus for now?”

“Hmm, a great plan. A place would be prepared by the time Ernesti graduates, so please don’t worry about that.”

Eru had no objections to this arrangement, and wanted to cheer loudly. But that aside, Eru still felt a bit unhappy. That’s right, this was just an emotional issue. No matter how wonderful this proposal was, Eru still wanted to fight back a little to show his dissatisfaction.

“But your majesty, wouldn’t this get in the way of handing the development issues to NTR Lab?”

Eru brought this up casually, but this was still a potential problem. This was what Ambrosius was concerned about in the first place.



“Oh, yes, we need to solve this problem. Well then, I will issue the first command to the Silver Phoenix Knights. ‘Give a solid blow to the arrogant noses of the researchers in NTR Lab’. Show me how you will use the new Silhouette knights to scare them out of their wits; teach them that age is just a trivial matter and tame them... Can you do that?”

Eru turned to the back again. He could see determination on all their faces. Seeing them nodding silently, Eru made up his mind.

“By your command... I will do all that I can to accomplish this mission.”

“... And that’s what happened.”

Before they realized it, the sunlight was coming in at a steep angle, the glaring sunset shining into the infirmary. After Helvi finished the story, she took a sip of water and rested. Edgar was listening with a serious face all this while, but when the story became weird, his expression turned into a stiff smile. The words ‘I just heard a ridiculous story’ was written on his face.

“I want to confirm something. That Silver Phoenix knights thingie... does it include me?”

Was he afraid of being enlisted, or looking forward to it? Anyway, it was hard to tell from his stiff expression.

“Yes, but it’s not mandatory, you can choose to turn down this appointment. There are no negative consequences for rejecting this appointment, you can still join any knight order after you graduate.”

“... By the way, has anyone quitted yet?”

Edgar already knew the answer, but he couldn’t help asking. Helvi squinted her almond eyes that were similar to a cat, smiling happily as she answered as Edgar expected.

“None, not one person turned it down.”

After hearing this answer, Edgar smiled wryly and rested his entire body onto the mattress.

For a moment, the two of them were silent. Edgar suddenly recalled something important he saw before losing conscious. His expression turned serious, after finding the right words, he brought up this matter:

“... Helvi, I have something to tell you.”

Seeing Helvi continued smiling with her head tilted, Edgar chewed on his words, but didn’t stop and finished his sentence.

“It’s about Tellestarle. The machine I fought, the one that got away... It was ‘prototype one’. That is your...”

Edgar couldn’t say anymore. Because Helvi’s finger was pressing on his lips.

“I know. I checked the other new models.”

Helvi lowered her gaze, considering her ties with ‘prototype one’, her reaction was unexpectedly calm. But Edgar could see some hints on how she really feels.

This was enough for Edgar to make up his mind.

“I see. Helvi, I promise you.”

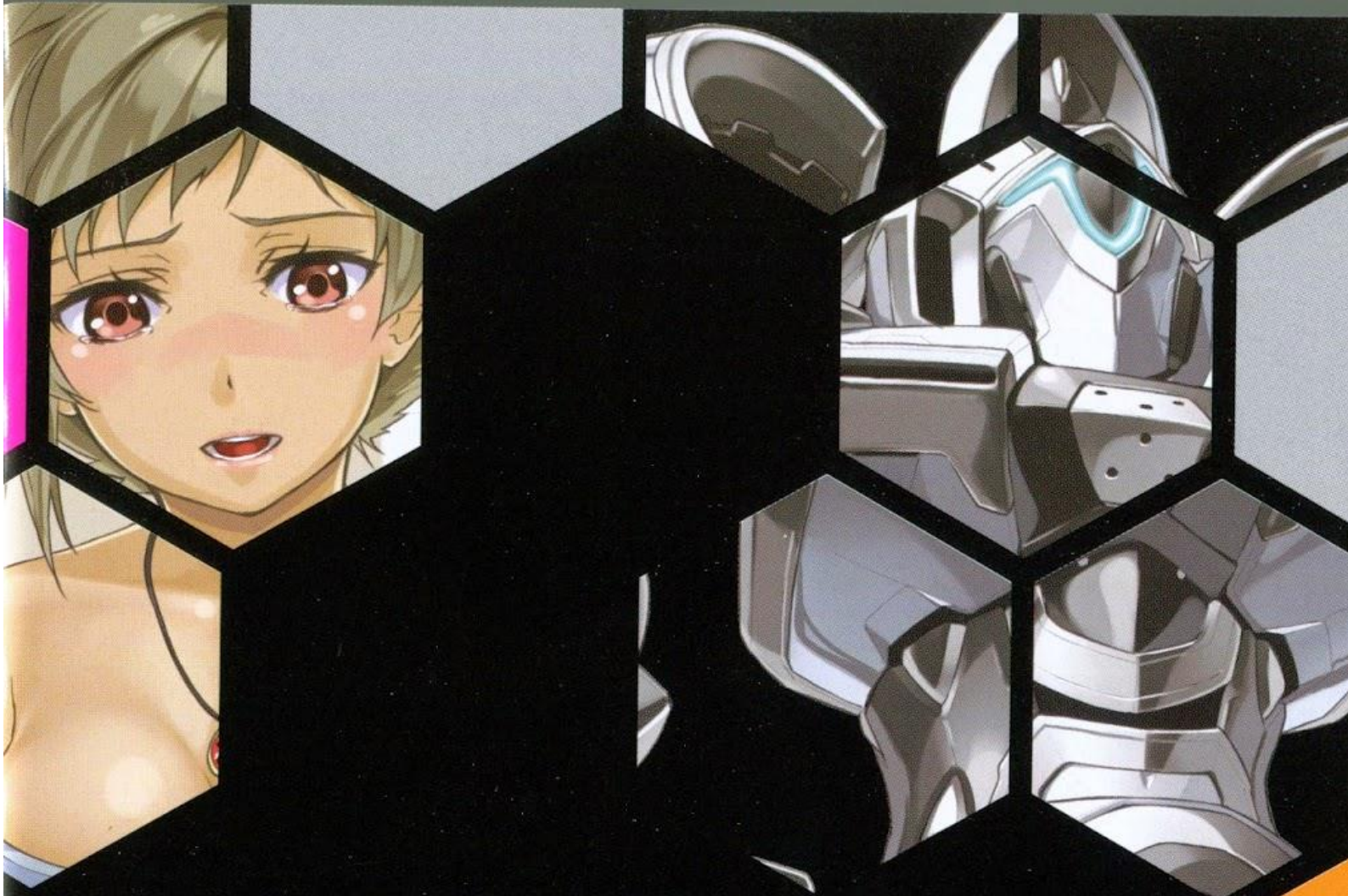
Helvi raised her head. Edgar held her hands tightly.

“One day, Earlecumber and I will get it back, or destroy it completely. I won’t let the robbers trample our hard work, and your partner.”

Edgar’s determined words surprised Helvi. She blinked her eyes blankly and then smiled.

“Yes, I will look forward to that... Thank you.”

She held Edgar’s hands as she replied softly.



騎士&魔法²

Knight's & Magic

INTRODUCTION

超脫常軌

這個故事的主角——**艾爾涅斯帝**

那不侷限於常識的行動獲得許多人的喜愛。

在第二集中，艾爾依然故我。

他毫無顧忌的行動不只驚動學園，更發展為震撼國家的大事件。

很多大人被迫奉陪12歲少年「只是興趣」的突發奇想。

可是，那卻大大超出興趣的範圍，引發**國家層級的大問題**。

這列名為艾爾的失控列車究竟會衝向何方？他的去向令人移不開眼光。

沒錯，他的存在本身也許就是「**超脫常軌**」的。

